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Remembering Him as Something Lost: Nostalgia and Traditional Masculinity in Twentieth-Century American Fiction

by

Joakim Ake Nilsson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Through my dissertation, entitled *Remembering Him as Something Lost: Nostalgia and Traditional Masculinity in Twentieth-Century American Fiction*, I try to create a flexible theoretical approach to reading the representation of masculinities in narrative texts, an approach which challenges the American critical tradition of universalizing male experiences and representing them as reflecting transhistorical American themes. While recognizing that men as a group oppress women as a group, I argue that male identities are multiple and not fixed, for they arise from complex and contradictory social practices which are fluid and defined *in relation* to women, as well as to other men. In the narratives I discuss--F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Phil Alden Robinson's film *Field of Dreams*--I identify the social practices which are features of what I refer to as "traditional" masculinity--nostalgia for an originary masculinity in response to a perceived crisis in masculinity, a perception leading to the idealization of a hero whom a first-person narrator portrays as symbolizing that lost or threatened masculine ideal.

Emphasizing the importance of particularizing each author's representation of male experience, I try both to understand the historical context that shapes each representation of traditional masculinity, and to reveal the misogyny, homophobia, and/or racism which accompanies the privilege of assumed subjectivity that these narrator's now feel is under threat. I make this critique even more explicit in my final chapter, where I explore the exclusion from assumed subjectivity, and thus from traditional masculinity, of African American men as portrayed in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and of gay men in Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*.

University of Alberta

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Remembering Him as Something Lost: Nostalgia and Traditional Masculinity in Twentieth-Century American Fiction* submitted by Joakim Ake Nilsson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. W. G. Watson (Supervisor)

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15 Sept. 2000

Preface

In many ways, this project began almost a dozen years ago, when I was an undergraduate in the mid-eighties, and has its specific roots in two American literature courses in which I enrolled in my third year. One course was entitled "American Romanticism," and focused on a largely F. O. Matthiessen-defined list of great American 19th Century writers--Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Whitman and Dickinson--and on the idea that great American writers worked in the world of romances rather than novels, symbols and myths rather than ideology and history, moral ambiguity rather than political or moral action. I learned that great American writers lived on the fringes of mainstream society, challenging the world of commerce and middle-class conventions by writing works of literature which were misunderstood and undervalued by readers and critics who favoured melodramas-written by what Hawthorne described as "that damned mob of scribbling women." Though these great American writers were neglected in their own day, like true great artists their genius became apparent to later readers and writers who finally recognized their true worth and their superiority to their more popular, but now forgotten, contemporaries.

The second course, entitled "The Apocalyptic Vision in American Literature," focused on authors of the late 19th and early 20th Century to World War II--Twain, London, Anderson, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Nathaniel West--and introduced me to the central American theme of the American Dream, a quest for happiness, success and freedom whose origins stretched back as far as the Puritans who came to America searching for a new Eden. After learning the literary and cultural origins of this quest, we then focused on the tragic vision of 20th Century writers who portrayed the inevitable failure of this quest due to the closure of the frontier and the increasing commercialization of American culture. As was the case with my course on 19th Century American writers, I was taught that the choice of great 20th Century American writers to represent moral ambiguity and complexity as a challenge to mainstream values defined their work as great literature, and that the unresolvable tension between hope and failure, reality and possibility, defined American culture. It was out of this critical background that my

interest in American literature and American cultural mythology grew and, as an M.A. student, I continued to read both American literature and criticism, becoming more and more interested in the use of first-person narration as a means of portraying the American quest for spiritual transcendence, the topic which I planned to explore in my doctoral dissertation.

It was 1994 when I began my doctoral studies, almost a decade after I had first been introduced to the great themes and writers of American literature, and I was to discover in my course work that the nature and focus of literary studies in general, and American literature in particular, had changed a great deal. Having continued to read during the three years between my graduate degrees, I felt I had arrived at an in depth knowledge of what critic Donald Pease calls the traditional "master-texts in American Studies" and the "different meta-narratives with which Americanists define their practices" (Pease 12); however, after a few weeks in my American literature course, "Race, Class and Gender in 19C and 20C American Literature," I quickly found that these "meta-narratives" were being challenged by more recent critics: rather than focusing on symbols and myths, and praising moral ambiguity, we now focused on texts as cultural documents which had to be situated historically and ideologically. We now read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, rather than *Moby Dick*, and discussed issues of slavery and the ideology of separate spheres, rather than the "great American themes" I had become so adept at identifying.

Though I was initially somewhat resistant to this change in focus and critical method--no doubt I felt out of date, and anxious about having to learn a new way of reading, as well as new theories and the terminology which accompany them--I soon began to recognize how this new direction in American literary studies opened a new and more interesting way to explore American literature and cultural mythology. Rather than reading literature as transcending history and politics, I recognized that by situating literature within its historical context I could begin to glimpse the social and political issues that the literature may both challenge and reproduce. As I was coming to recognize, literature is not a well-wrought urn, or a series of apolitical symbols and themes, but a contribution to the cultural practices of the socio-historical context out of which it is created.

I had read theory as an undergraduate and an M.A. student--Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, feminist theory--but it had always remained separate from my reading of American literature; now, influenced by this American literature class, and by a Chaucer class which also focused on historicizing questions of gender, class and power, I began to rethink my doctoral dissertation. Recognizing the problematic nature of the traditional American canon and the canonical critics who helped define it, as well as changes in how American literature and culture are studied, and finding myself increasingly interested in the exploration of the representation of masculinities, a subject still largely unexplored in literary studies, I chose to redefine my project. I now realized that my original conception of my doctoral dissertation simply involved reinforcing traditional methods of reading canonical texts, so I decided that I would explore how masculinity is constructed in response to particular social and historical circumstances, and represented through texts traditionally read as representing canonical American themes, rather than the experiences, desires, and anxieties of particular men.

I want to thank Mary Chapman for introducing me to the theories and methods of New Americanists in her graduate class, and for challenging me to question the "traditional Master-texts of American Studies" I had become comfortable with, and look beyond symbols and American themes to the politics and social issues which I had been taught to overlook or dismiss. Glenn Burger introduced me to gender theory and issues of performance through a class on Chaucer and his literary influences. This very difficult, very challenging class sparked my interest in masculinities, and thus helped redefine my dissertation, and also made me realize that if I could survive this class, I could complete my Candidacy Exams and my dissertation. Chris Bullock accepted a very rough paper for presentation as part of the Dimensions of Masculinities Series, and with his thoughtful comments I was able to transform that brief paper into Chapter Five of my dissertation, the chapter that would establish for me the connection between masculinity, nostalgia, and canonicity. Garry Watson has helped me rethink and reshape this dissertation from the beginning, always offering comments and suggestions that forced me to rethink and revise my writing. And maybe more importantly, your encouragement helped me to continue

writing when I was close to quitting the Doctoral program: like a marathon runner with six miles to the finish, I needed a good coach to remind me how far I had come, and why I had started the race in the first place. And finally, I want to thank my wife Brenda for gently reminding me about my goals and my priorities. I have finished this dissertation because you gave me a year during which I only had to concentrate on researching and writing ... and remembering to do the dishes.

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INTRODUCTION

Theorizing American Literature: Traditions and Revisions

In 1972, Donald M. Kartiganer and Malcolm A. Griffith published an anthology entitled *Theories of American Literature*. It contained excerpts and original essays by critics considered responsible for defining American literature and the methods by which it was studied--Perry Miller, Richard Chase, Leo Marx, R. W. B. Lewis, F. O. Matthiessen, Lionel Trilling, just to name a few--and was "designed as a companion text for students of American literature" (v). Writing in a brief preface, the authors explain that

> the distinctive feature of these essays is their attempt to see American literature as some kind of integrated whole, to discover in as deep and imaginative ways as possible the underlying unities of a literature that often appears unusually fragmentary. Whatever the differences in their findings the intention is always to move toward a theory of American literature, to create the synthesis that will at last identify the most decisive lines of an American literary tradition. In making such attempts these critics reflect and respond to a similar quest in our writers, for they too have been in constant search for a unifying tradition. (v)

It is somewhat ironic in retrospect that Kartiganer and Griffith celebrate this search for "a unifying tradition," given that they were writing in a time of social change when an increasing recognition of difference was undermining the myth of American unity and equality under a democratic system. Most of the critics included in the anthology were writing in the forties and fifties, a period dominated by New Criticism's focus on aesthetics and the self-containment of literature, and by liberal assumptions about the unity of American culture and the power of democracy to combat the oppressiveness and dehumanization of communism.[1]

Creating a genealogy of American criticism and theories of American literature, Myra Jehlen argues that the "search for a unifying tradition," which Kartiganer and Griffith claim is a long standing tradition in American literature as well as criticism, was in fact a response to cold war anxiety and a retreat from reading literature in relation to

history and culture. Jehlen explains how "the sidelining of history in the criticism of the forties and fifties, or its removal to the periphery of analysis, combined with the period's general ideological conformity, produced an account of American literature that was probing and acute about its artistic qualities but hardly even aware of its ideology or of its representation of social issues" (3). Using New Critical close reading, and looking for symbolism, myth, and archetypes, critics of the forties and fifties defined several "American themes" which they discovered in the works of ""representative' or 'major' American authors [who] tend to be a fairly predictable and very small group of white, male writers, for the most part those canonized by Matthiessen in *American Renaissance*" (Reising 17). Published in 1941, F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* quickly became the canonical center of American literary studies, the text which "determined the books that students would read and critics would write about for decades to come" and "influenced our assumptions about what kind of person can be a literary genius, what kind of subjects great literature can discuss, our notions about who can be a hero and who cannot, notions about what constitutes heroic behaviour, significant activity, central issues" (Tompkins 199).[2]

The social changes of the sixties began to expose the reality of exclusion and inequality in America, and these social and political challenges began to transform assumptions about American literature and whose experiences were being represented by the "American themes" found in the texts which comprised the American literary canon. The Civil Rights movement challenged the exclusion and oppression of ethnic minorities, and the Women's movement exposed the ways women had been denied a voice with which they could challenge misogynistic stereotypes and their political and economic ramifications. Continuing her genealogy, Jehlen explains how "in the sixties and seventies such [ideological] contradictions," which were ignored by earlier American literary and cultural critics, "became paramount concerns:"

> Racial, class and political conflicts revealed a heterogeneity that pluralism did not always reconcile. The notion of an all-encompassing American identity, in literature as in society, now appeared not only incomplete but, in its denial of nonhegemonic difference, actually repressive. In the way

> the universal "man" subsumes subuniversal "woman," the universal "American" was now seen to subsume "others" to whom it denied universality. (4)

While Kartiganer and Griffith were looking back to critics who sought the unique "Americaness" of American literature in assumptions about unifying themes, other critics were asserting the particularity and heterogeneity of American experience: determined to give a voice to men and women who sought to express their oppression and exclusion from mainstream society, these critics began to address questions of racism and misogyny in canonical texts, and to search for texts which they believed had, on the basis of presenting "other" voices, been excluded from the American literary canon.[3]

Of particular importance to the study of masculinity, which is the emphasis of this project, is the growth of feminist literary criticism in the seventies. Recognizing both the exclusion of most of women's writings from the American canon, and their own exclusion from a largely male-dominated academia which defined the canon and how scholars understood American literature, feminist scholars began to rediscover a "lost" tradition of American women writers, and to expose the exclusionary gender politics implicit in traditional readings of American literature. Challenging the liberal consensus approach to American literature, feminist scholars used the traditional method of close reading to assert their belief that "literature is political." Arguing that "one of the main things that keeps the design of our literature unavailable to the consciousness of the woman reader [...] is the very posture of the apolitical, the pretense that literature speaks universal truths" (xi) Judith Fetterley, in her 1978 book *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, urged women to become "resisting rather than [...] assenting reader[s]," (xxii) because "power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else" (xiii).

In 1983, Nina Baym published a crucial article on the role of gender in the theorizing of American literature, an article which moved feminist theory beyond exploring the representation of power and gender in particular canonical texts to addressing the political underpinnings of the American literary canon itself. Trying to account for "How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors" (her subtitle), Baym argues that

canonical American critics have used many criteria--aesthetics, myths, transhistorical American themes--which by their nature include some male authors and exclude almost all female authors. If American literature has involved the writing of "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" (her title)--the search for freedom, the quest for the frontier, the escape from limitations imposed by society (usually represented by women) to achieve the dream of self-making--in general, the criticism of society and the search for what Richard Poirier describes as "a world elsewhere"--Baym argues that women have been excluded from the canon because "what critics have done is to assume [...] women writers invariably represented the consensus, rather than the criticism of it; to assume that their gender made them part of the consensus in a way that prevented them from partaking in the criticism" (69). Feminist critics such as Fetterley and Baym explored issues of power and exclusion ignored by critics who focused on aesthetics and other largely apolitical approaches to American literature. Literature clearly did not communicate universal themes; rather, it represented particular experiences, almost exclusively male, which feminist critics argued had to be interpreted in light of the political realities of gender and gender stereotypes.[4]

Feminist theory focused on the experiences of women, but it also raised questions concerning the nature of gender which could also be applied to men, and thus opened the way for the study of masculinities. As Baym and other feminist literary scholars argued that women had been excluded from the canon due to traditional male stereotypes of women, scholars interested in the nature and experience of masculinity could begin to recognize that the representation of Man as "universal" may itself undermine the ability to represent the experiences of particular men. As Elizabeth and Joseph Pleck argue in the "Introduction" to *The American Man* (1980), an early work in the study of American masculinity,

> the activity and behavior of men are seen as human activity, that of women as distinctly female. Historians (mostly men) have considered at length the public deeds and quests of (selected) men. Many of the facts about men's lives in the past are thus already known. However, these facts are badly in need of a new, sex-conscious reinterpretation. This project requires reviewing men's historical experience, not as human history but as the

> history of only one of the two sexes and, specifically, that of the more privileged sex. (1)

Feminist theorists had forced men to begin to study themselves as gendered beings whose actions and experiences had not been excluded from history and literature, as was the case with women, but whose actions and experiences had been totalized under the headings of "human nature," "human psyche," "American" themes and history. As gender historian Nancy Cott explains, "in contrast to women--who are too often seen only in terms of their sex--men have been the unmarked sex. Since we know so little about men as gendered beings, 'men's history' must be about the social construction of masculinity and manhood rather than simply about men as a group" (206). According to literary critic James D. Riemer, discussing men as one of two genders "shift[s] the focus of criticism from the manner in which men's lives reflect universal concerns or dilemmas to a more intimate, personal concern with how cultural values, particularly those connected with ideals of masculinity, affect the lives of men on a personal, human level, often creating dilemmas for the individual male" (294).

Like the study of men which it spurred in the late 70s and early 80s, the feminist theory of this period focused on gender as the primary axis through which to theorize questions of identity and experience and their relation to power and privilege. But the voices of those who were not white, middle-class heterosexuals began to speak against the assumption that gender alone could account for the politics of oppression. As Marilyn Frye explained in 1983,

> White feminists come to renewed and earnest thought about racism not entirely spontaneously. We are pressed by women of color. Women of color have been at feminist conferences, meetings and festivals and speaking up, pointing out that their needs and interests are not being taken into account nor answered and that much that white feminists do and say is racist. Some white feminists have been aware of and acting against racism all along, and spontaneously, but the topic of racism has arrived per force [...], not so much because some white feminists urged this but because women of color have demanded it. (110)

Exploring issues of power clearly involves exploring other axes--race, class, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality--which intersect with and complicate the simple binary of male as oppressor/female as oppressed. Faced with questions of how race, class, and sexuality also contribute to social positioning and privileging, for both women and men, feminist theory has looked to a more pluralistic representation of power to replace "the simplistic assumption that we can neatly discuss 'women' and 'men' as discrete categories within which members are assumed to share certain life experiences, life chances and worldviews" (Messner 7).

Contextualizing Difference: Historicizing "Canonical" American Literature

The recognition of the historical and social particularity of experiences and access to power has led literary critics such as Paul Lauter to argue for a reassessment of both what is studied as American literature and how it is to be theorized into American literary history. Reversing the traditional search for unifying American themes, Lauter argues for an approach that will study "the literatures of America" as "a comparativist discipline":

> the literary history of the dominant white and male culture will only in a limited degree be a useful account of the development of the varied literary cultures of the United States. A full literary history of this country requires both parallel and integrated accounts of the differing literary traditions and thus of differing (and changing) social realities. (53)

Taking the example of the traditional American symbol of the "frontier" which has usually been associated with images of the West and themes of escape and freedom, opportunity, and self-making, Lauter points out how "American Indians, such as William Apes, Elias Boudinot and Blackhawk shared a vision of the importance of the 'frontier,' but in their experience it was often represented as the intrusion of the boots of a giant into the grounds of their hunt or into the land within which the life and culture of their people were rooted," while "for antebellum blacks, the 'frontier' was located as much at the Mason-Dixon line as anywhere else, and the perilous journey from slavery to selfhood was the major concern" (57). For Lauter literature, like all as aspects of culture, is political and involves questions of voice and representation: culture is not neutral or self-evident, but is

a "contested ground upon which groups with differing interests contend for priority. Cultural marginalization [...] represents social and political struggle, though the extent to which culture is defined by or redefines politics cannot be stated in the abstract but must be anchored by looking at specific groups in specific time-frames" (49).

In the same way that feminist critics, and critics like Lauter, have recognized the importance of addressing the complexity and particularity of experiences in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality, so too have critics theorizing masculinities begun to argue against the totalizing concepts of Man and patriarchy. As David Rosen argues in *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity*,

> While sex-difference categories operate in all societies and while the categories of male and female are nearly universal, the collective known as men is not singular or simple. The forces constructing manhood are too diverse to allow singularity--from differences in biology within the group called men, to differences in sexuality, ethnicity, and class, to differences in the way men may be viewed by women and other men of likewise varying differences. (xii)

Using a method "like that of many Anglo-American feminists, strongly influenced by close reading," Rosen studies the representation of masculinity in literature from Beowulf to D. H. Lawrence, examining "the difference between what each artist asserts the 'male experience' consists of and what each artist implies men experience" (xviii). In choosing the method of close reading, Rosen suffers from the same fallacy as many early feminist critics reading literature from other historical periods or cultures: that works of literature alone can reveal how gender is constructed and operates in a particular context. Rosen's failure to explore the historical context of the works he discusses, and to effectively situate the text in that context, leaves him reading back into the texts his own contemporary assumptions about the complexity of masculinity. Aware of this critical tendency, many critics have focused on historicizing literature as a means of understanding its uses within its own context, challenging the New Critical assumption made by Rosen and others that "the words and works are an urn which the contents overflow," reading literature instead as texts whose meaning signifies within the socio-historical context in which they were

produced.

Reasserting the connection between society and literature, and thus reading literature not as an aesthetic object but as a means of exploring American culture, recent critics have undermined the belief that there are dominant, transcultural themes in American literature by showing how these themes fail to represent the diversity of experiences which make up American cultural and literary history. In the last decade, with the emergence of New Historicism, critics have begun to reassert the importance of history in the study of literature as a way of challenging the assumed transhistoricity of literary value, themes, and ideas, and of questioning the New Critical practice of close-reading, which separates literary works from their cultural context by assuming that critics can look back and read literature effectively by projecting present assumptions and values onto the past. Influenced by the writings of Marxist cultural theorists such as Althusser and Gramsci, as well as the work of Michel Foucault, the "New Americanists," as Frederick Crews has dubbed them, use history as a means of addressing questions of power and ideology, hegemony and counter-hegemony. Crews explains how "it was their insistence on *historicizing*--that is, on tracing the contingent sociopolitical interests served by given beliefs and practices--that broke the hold of a timidly moralizing, unity-minded formalism that had long outlived its usefulness" (xvi). This insistence on history works to denaturalize assumptions about gender, race, and sexuality by exposing the socio-historical particularity of hegemonic cultural assumptions and practices. Again, these critics focus on issues of cultural diversity and historical particularity in order to address questions of power and exclusion, while recognizing the complexity of how power can circulate. Abandoning a traditional Marxist model of historical determinism centering on questions of production and class-based oppression, New Americanists have constructed a model of power that revolves around the roles of discourse and knowledge. As French cultural theorist Michel Foucault argues,

> Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of

> resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (101)

As I will argue in my next chapter, it is the paradoxical nature of power that is of particular significance to the study of masculinities, especially in the case of "traditional" masculinity where there is often a gap between the reality of institutional privilege and the perceptual experience of that privilege.

Influenced by these important changes to assumptions about what constitutes American literature and how it is to be studied--questions about the socio-historical construction of American masculinity and the importance of particularizing masculinities, about the importance of historical context in understanding how literature represents masculinities and of recognizing the complex power relations that exist between men, as well as between men and women--my critical approach to texts and the kind of questions I wish to address through my doctoral dissertation have changed extensively. But one thing that has remained largely unchanged is the choice of texts on which I plan to focus my work. All the texts can be considered canonical American texts in that all have been read as representing traditional American themes. *The Great Gatsby* is firmly entrenched in the twentieth-century American canon, with its focus on the tragedy of a self-made man who believes too strongly in the American Dream; *On the Road* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* may be less canonical because the canon of post-W W II fiction is less fixed than that of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, but both have been interpreted as novels which focus on themes of escape and the search for freedom and a new beginning outside an oppressive society. Though not part of the literary or filmic canon, *Field of Dreams* is also a text about searching for "a world elsewhere," a film whose popularity revolves around its representation of traditional American themes: a male main character who is perceived as heroic and as personifying the American spirit because he has grand dreams which involve searching for a place of freedom and innocence outside mainstream society. So one might ask, given my awareness of the challenges to the traditional canon and the growing interest in works traditionally excluded from that canon, Why am I still choosing to focus on a group of white, middle-class, heterosexual male authors?

Inside or Outside? Rethinking Canonicity

As is apparent from my brief description of how critical theories and methodologies have changed American literary studies and the assumptions about the literary canon, my focus when discussing the idea of canonicity is less on the question of which *texts* are included and excluded from the American canon, and more about *how* traditional critics and critical methods work to determine how texts are interpreted. Including previously excluded texts in the canon does not address the more important question of how those texts are read, and who holds the power to determine that reading, but instead relies on what John Guillory argues is the liberal pluralist assumption of "representation," "which posits a homology between the process of *exclusion*, by which socially defined minorities are excluded from the exercise of power or from political representation, and the process of *selection*, by which certain works are designated canonical or noncanonical" (6). Guillory challenges the assumption that simply including texts by minority writers into the university curriculum will somehow give those excluded from institutional privilege political voice and power, and also argues that without changing how texts are interpreted, seemingly noncanonical texts can be fit into the canon, and thus converted into "cultural capital," because the canon is constructed from a set of critical assumptions rather than a fixed set of texts: "The canon achieves its imaginary totality, then, not by embodying itself in a really existing list, but by retroactively constructing its individual texts as a *tradition*, to which works may be added and subtracted without altering the impression of totality or cultural homogeneity" (33).

As I pointed out when discussing Kartiganer and Griffith's idea of finding "underlying unities" as the prime concern of theorists of American literature, the American canon was constructed and has been maintained by the critical assumption of "totality or cultural homogeneity": American critics created a tradition which focuses on particular American themes which are seen as representative. Without questioning this assumption of homogeneity, it becomes possible to simply include previously excluded texts by finding in those texts the themes that define the tradition. As Russell Reising argues,

> I don't regard it as either necessary or valuable to prove that Douglas or,

> say, Richard Wright, Tillie Olsen or any other writer could also be read as a romancer, as a forger of 'complex pastoralism,' or as a creator of worlds elsewhere. Such an imposition of a preexisting ideology or theory would reveal little beyond the fact that marginal writers can always be made to conform to the literary standards of what are seen as more homogeneous cultural traditions. The inclusion of excluded writers is unimportant unless the ideological--aesthetic, political, philosophical, etc.--basis of the entire canon is revised. (9)

One of my primary arguments in this project is that canonicity is less about texts and more about how texts are interpreted within a tradition which homogenizes texts by looking for American themes rather than for socio-historical particular representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Given this tendency, it is essential to reveal the critical assumptions that contribute to the homogenization of both texts which have been traditionally included in the canon and those which have been excluded.

Arguing that the canon is more about how texts are interpreted rather than which texts are included and excluded reflects my belief that texts themselves are not *inherently* canonical or noncanonical. Though I have chosen to focus on four writers who may be perceived as canonical because they are white, middle-class, heterosexual men, I do not believe that the texts which they produce are themselves inherently canonical, as if canonicity--conservative ideology reinforcing privilege--is contained within the texts themselves. As Guillory asks,

> why must the writing of minority authors be considered intrinsically *subversive*, as the overturning of supposedly hegemonic values represented by Homer or Shakespeare? These alternatives are only enjoined upon us by the supposition that canonical works can be characterized politically in some universal way, as either progressive or regressive in their social effects. (22)

As I will discuss in my next chapter, texts that are considered subversive because they address issues of racism may reproduce mainstream attitudes regarding gender and sexuality. Given the complexity of a work of literature, any text read across a range of

axes--race, gender, sexuality, religion, politics--will be found to simultaneously challenge and reproduce the ideology of its socio-historical context, and thus we have to argue that the text is subversive or hegemonic in regard to certain issues in a certain time and place. And as Guillory implies, some traditionally canonical authors have been recuperated because their works are rich enough that critics can approach them from a range of critical perspectives, allowing us to explore issues of sexuality in Chaucer or performative theories of identity in Shakespeare.

Though the texts which I have chosen have traditionally been read as reproducing themes which comprise the American tradition, my focus on how these texts represent the experience of masculinity within a particular historical context will reveal that a text can be both progressive and regressive, can problematize some ideological assumptions while reproducing others, and thus can embody the cultural contradictions of the historical moment to which the writer is responding. As Guillory explains, a cultural

> work [...] cannot be allegorized as intrinsically canonical or intrinsically noncanonical, intrinsically hegemonic or intrinsically antihegemonic. No cultural work of any interest at all is simple enough to be allegorized in this way, because any cultural work will objectify in its very form and content the same social conflicts that the canon debate allegorizes by means of a divided curriculum. (52)

Rather than exploring how some authors have been excluded from the canon, I will focus on how writers have been deemed canonical because their texts have been fit into the tradition, homogenized by critics who see these works as addressing American themes. By situating these texts historically and exploring how they respond to and represent their particular "social conflicts," we can both restore the heterogeneity and ideological complexity of the texts and reveal the critical and ideological assumptions of the tradition in which they have been included.

I have found Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* very useful in working through the importance of situating texts historically as a means of trying to recognize and understand the "cultural work" that texts do within their social context. Tompkins explains that

> Instead of seeing novels as merely entertainment, or as works of art interpretable apart from their context, which derive their value from "imaginative vitality" and address themselves to transhistorical entities such as the "soul of man," I see them as doing certain kind of cultural work within a specific historical situation, and value them for that reason. I see their plots and characters as providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions. (200)

Tompkins foregrounds the importance of recognizing how texts mean in a particular context and thus she emphasizes the need for critics to respond to texts not with aesthetic judgments, contemporary and thus anachronistic political views, or beliefs in transhistorical themes, but with a sensitivity to historical and cultural particularity. Tompkins focuses on understanding the author's intentions and the reception of the author's work within its particular cultural context, and thus she sees the role of the critic as using history not "as in previous historical criticism, as a backdrop against which one can admire the artist's skill in transforming the raw material of reality into art," but "to recreate, as sympathetically as possible, the context from which they [literary texts] sprang and the specific problems to which they were addressed" (xiii).

Tompkins' critical method focuses on the identification and representation of an author's political intentionality, and on the belief that intentions are conscious both to the writer and to readers. This critical assumption becomes problematic when studying questions of gender, and especially the representation of masculinity, for as many critics have argued, male experience has traditionally been equated with "human" experience and thus the nature and social construction of masculinity has remained largely unexplored. Though I argue that the texts which I discuss all focus on the representation of the experiences of particular men situated in and responding to particular social and historical circumstances, I am also aware that many of the author's assumptions about gender are not necessarily conscious, and are not necessarily central to the author's literary or thematic intentions. As a result, reading gender and particularly masculinity involves both

being aware of the author's conscious and unconscious assumptions about gender, and the socio-historical context which may shape those assumptions, as well as reading against those assumptions in light of contemporary beliefs about misogyny, homophobia, and the social construction of gender roles.

Tompkins articulates a reluctance to impose her own values and beliefs on to the texts she studies, and argues for a sort of historical relativism: "I have [...] not criticized the social and political attitudes that motivated these writers, but have tried instead to inhabit and make available to a modern audience the viewpoint from which their politics made sense" (xiii). As I have suggested, I agree with Tompkins' emphasis on situating texts and authors in their historical context, but I also believe it is important to expose the ideological implications of texts, because while the author may share assumptions about "social reality" with some members of society, others may be excluded or misrepresented by how the author chooses to "dramatize conflicts" and "recommend solutions." I will argue that each of the authors I discuss responds to historical changes in American culture by dramatizing these changes as a crisis in masculinity experienced by a male narrator, and that while each author differs in his particular solutions to this crisis, each articulates a belief in a traditional American masculinity which has been undermined, whether by women, materialism, or bureaucracy, and is nostalgically idealized through the novel's hero, who symbolizes that lost masculine subjectivity. While it is important to recognize the social concerns these authors were responding to and how their narratives were read in their particular context, it is also important to explore what social and ideological assumptions each author felt they were challenging, and what assumptions they were reproducing in order to articulate that challenge.

While my dissertation will focus largely on how masculinity is represented through canonical texts, and on how nostalgia is used to articulate the experience of a crisis in hegemonic masculinity, I will also explore "other masculinities" by discussing two noncanonical novels: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Andrew Holleran's *Dancer From the Dance*. Ellison explores the attempts of his African American narrator to construct a sense of identity through the act of reflection and narration, but unlike the narrators of the other novels I discuss, Ellison's narrator does not nostalgically mourn the loss of his

assumed subjectivity, for he has been denied a sense of identity by a society that has rendered him invisible through its racial stereotypes and social expectations. *Invisible Man* differs from the other narratives I discuss in that Ellison's narrator never meets another male character whom he can nostalgically idealize; I argue that this lack of an idealized hero reflects the narrator's inability to assume his subjectivity, and thus he instead meets potential role models whom he finally rejects in an attempt to discover and assert his own sense of identity and subjectivity. Andrew Holleran's novel has been celebrated and criticized as a rewriting of *The Great Gatsby* in the context of seventies gay subculture, Holleran portraying a first-person narrator who makes the hero Malone a symbol of gay culture: he searches for true love and eternal beauty, but is destroyed by his own idealism. Though some critics have criticized Holleran for being simply derivative of Fitzgerald's novel, I will argue that Holleran explores the nature of canonicity by portraying an author who is searching for a means of portraying gay subculture to a mainstream audience. I will argue that Holleran's narrator chooses *The Great Gatsby* as his model for "the great American gay novel" because he wants his novel to be both popular and serious, and because the nostalgic romanticizing of Malone's story makes gay culture safe for mainstream tastes. Holleran juxtaposes his narrator's apolitical symbolization of Malone as the idealistic gay man doomed by his dreams of perfect love with the practical efforts of gay men to create real political and material change in post-Stonewall gay culture.

Notes

1. See Myra Jehlen for a discussion of how anti-communist sentiments in post-World War Two American culture influenced the formation of the American literary canon and assumptions about how great American literature reinforces American ideals of freedom and individualism.

2. Michael Cadden suggests that Matthiessen's canon, ironically, reflects a need to compensate for his own sexuality, arguing that "Matthiessen's own fluidity of (homo)sexual sympathy [...] in part determines the womanless world of canonical greatness" and motivated Matthiessen "to insure a manly tradition purged of the

effeminate" (31).

3. Louis Montrose makes the important point that we cannot totalize as inherently radical the attitudes and ideological beliefs of minorities who had previously been excluded from the academy, as my last note on F. O. Matthiessen suggests. Discussing the changing demographic nature of English departments and its influence on changes in literary theory and scholarship, Montrose explains that

> there has been taking place, for some time, an opening of the profession of English to scholars whose gender, ethnicity, religious or class origins, political allegiances, or sexual preferences (or some combination of these) complicate their participation in the cultural and ideological traditions enshrined in the canonical works they study and teach. Experiences of exclusion or otherness may, of course, provoke a compensatory embrace of the dominant culture, a desire for acceptance and assimilation; but they may also (and, perhaps, simultaneously) provoke attitudes of resistance or contestation. Such divided and dissonant positions may provide vantage points for the appropriation and critique of particular canonical texts--and, more important, for an appropriation and critique of the constitutive categories and normative procedures of literary studies. (393)

4. Joyce W. Warren argues that the American myth of individualism was constructed in the nineteenth century by writers like Emerson and Twain, writers who now comprise the traditional American literary canon. This myth of individualism relies on stereotypical representations of women--they represent the conformity of an oppressive and hostile society against which these authors defined the rebellious individualism of men--and thus by its very nature excludes women, and thus women authors. Warren argues that "as a man, [Emerson] could take for granted that the individualism of his society applied to him" and that "For Henry David Thoreau, Transcendentalism coincided with the masculine tradition of American individualism. But for Margaret Fuller, the Transcendental doctrine of the self was incompatible with American culture" (55-6).

CHAPTER ONE: Exploring Masculinities

In my "Introduction" I argued for the importance of re-reading American literature by men as representing male experience, rather than American themes which both exclude women and minorities and undermine the historical and social complexity of masculinity. Influenced by feminist theory's focus on the relationship between power and the construction of gender, recent scholars exploring the representation of masculinity in literature, such as James D. Riemer, have begun to recognize that

> traditionally, literary criticism by males has viewed the dilemmas of male characters on an abstract, moral, aesthetic, or intellectual level rather than in simply human terms. In particular, the nature and quality of human relationships for the male and the manner by which these are affected by masculine ideals are generally neglected. (293)

In this chapter, I will discuss the complexity of masculinities in American literature by exploring how access to social power and privilege helps shape different experiences of masculinity. I will focus my discussion on what I term "traditional" masculinity--a masculinity which relies on a nostalgically idealized past when, according to its proponents, men had freedom and the power of self-definition, characteristics inherent to a traditional masculine ideal. Those who argue for a return to a traditional model of masculinity and gender roles, usually white, heterosexual men, believe their masculinity is being threatened by the gains made in contemporary society by women and by ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities.

In order to narrow my discussion of the nature and political uses of traditional masculinity, I have chosen to discuss its representation in four popular twentieth-century American narratives which portray a first-person narrator recounting his experiences and relationship with a male hero, what I refer to as "a narrative of homosocial mediation." My interest in these narratives lies in exploring how this ideal of traditional masculinity has manifested itself through different heroes experiencing similar threats to their masculine ideals and how these historically particular narratives have contributed to a continuing transhistorical myth of American masculinity which accompanies a regularly occurring fear

that this traditional masculinity is in crisis.

Male-Male Relationships: Escapism, Patriarchy, Masculinities

One cannot write about the representation of male-male relationships in American literature without discussing Leslie Fiedler's immensely influential book, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Fiedler explores what he argues is a central theme in American literature: a white male protagonists runs away from the responsibilities of marriage, family and society, choosing instead to befriend another male character, often Native American or African American, and live with him in nature, and thus outside mainstream society. As Fiedler argues, "the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat--anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and a woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility" (26). Desiring the freedom of what Fiedler argues is a sustained pre-adolescence, the American protagonist searches for "a substitute for wife or mother presumably waiting in the green heart of nature: the natural man, the good companion, pagan and unashamed--Queequeg or Chingachgook or Nigger Jim" (26) because

> It is maturity above all things that the American writer fears, and marriage seems to him its essential sign. For marriage stands traditionally not only for the reconciliation with the divided self, a truce between head and heart, but also for a compromise with society, an acceptance of responsibility and drudgery and dullness. (338)

According to Fiedler, American literature is defined by "a delicate homosexuality" because "There is finally no heterosexual solution which the American psyche finds completely satisfactory, no imagined or real consummation between man and woman found worthy of standing in our fiction for the healing of a breach between consciousness and unconsciousness, reason and impulse, society and nature" (338, 339).

This last quotation clearly reveals Fiedler's reliance on psychoanalytic and Jungian theories of social and sexual development, and also his rather traditional assumptions about what constitutes American literature. Fiedler clearly contributes to the theories of

American literature which exclude women writers--*Love and Death* predates the emergence of feminist theory and revisions to the canon, and was itself read as a radical challenge to more traditional readings of American literature--but Fiedler's analysis of particular texts nevertheless provides interesting insights into American literature if we recognize that he is discussing literature almost exclusively written by men, a fact Fiedler does not address. Fiedler's real flaw is that he does not particularize the novels he discusses as addressing historically specific male experiences, myths and anxieties. Instead, Fiedler generalizes his reading of particular texts by men in order to help reinforce the myth of American exceptionalism, arguing that "There is a pattern imposed both by the writers of our past and the very conditions of life in the United States from which no American novelist can escape, no matter what philosophy he consciously adopts or what theme he thinks he pursues" (13). Rather than historicizing or even explaining in material terms "the very conditions of life" which he believes determine the nature of American literature and culture, Fiedler relies on an ahistorical mix of psychoanalysis, Jungian archetypes and contemporary assumptions about gender to portray as culturally inevitable an American myth of escapist masculinity. However problematic his ahistorical and totalizing explanation of male-male relationships in American literature strikes contemporary scholars of American literature, Fiedler nevertheless identified an important tradition in canonical American literature--literature by and about white middle and upper-class men--a tradition which needs to be contextualized and explored in light of developments in feminist theory and the theorizing of masculinities.

A quarter century after the publication of *Love and Death in the American Novel*, and influenced by the field of feminist theory and the growing interest in gay and lesbian studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick published *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Drawing on anthropologist Gayle Rubin's essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes Toward a Political Economy of Sex," a feminist reinterpretation of the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, Sedgwick argues that

> in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structure for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent

> and potentially active structural congruency. For historical reasons, this special relationship may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensely structured combination of the two. (1985, 25)

While Fiedler believed that male-male relationships in American literature represent men's desire to escape women and social responsibility, Sedgwick suggests that all male relationships, even those that seemingly exclude women, contribute to male privilege and the oppression of women. What Fiedler reads as narratives of escape from traditional male responsibility, Sedgwick reads as "articulations and mechanisms of the enduring inequality of power between men and women" (5).

Sedgwick's interpretation of male-male relationships relies on the assumption that in patriarchal societies, men as a group oppress women as a group. Yet, Sedgwick recognizes that the representation of women and their oppression is complex and socially and historically specific, and that "it is of serious political importance that our tools for examining the signifying relation be subtle and discriminate ones, and that our literary knowledge of the most crabbed or oblique paths of meaning not be oversimplified in the face of panic-inducing images of real violence, especially the violence of, around, and to sexuality" (10). In her "Introduction," Sedgwick provides a brief analysis of "the great ideological blockbuster of white bourgeois feminism" (8), *Gone with the Wind*, to reveal its complex and varied representations of female sexuality and what it means to be a "lady," and to underline the importance of recognizing the socio-historical particularity of these representations of sexuality and gender. As Sedgwick explains,

> To assume that sex signifies power in a flat, unvarying relation of metaphor or synecdoche will always entail a blindness, not to the rhetorical or the pyrotechnic, but to such historical categories as class and race. Before we can fully achieve and use our intuitive grasp of the leverage that sexual relations seem to offer on the relations of oppression, we need more--more different, more complicated, more diachronically apt, more off-centred--more daring and prehensile applications of our present understanding of what it means for one thing to signify another. (10-11)

In *Between Men*, Sedgwick makes a valuable contribution to feminist theory. She provides a methodology which allows for increasingly subtle readings of the historical construction of gender and the means by which these constructions allow men to oppress women. But what about complex and subtle readings of masculinities?

In "want[ing] to situate these readings as a contribution to a dialectic within feminist theory between more or less historicizing views of the oppression of women" (11), Sedgwick relies on a model of patriarchy which does not possess the subtlety she extends to reading the representation of women. Sedgwick does discuss issues of oppression and homosexuality, arguing that "Only a view of homosexuality that is not only fully historical, but plural, described in relation to class interests, and placed appropriately in the context of various specific institutions and forms by which gender and class are transmitted, will be of analytic value" (215), but she does not argue for a similar view of heterosexual masculinity, relying instead on a model of patriarchy which Judith Butler critiques in her ground-breaking work on the social construction of gender, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Addressing the problematic treatment of masculinity by much of feminist theory, Butler warns that

> The very notion of "patriarchy" has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts. As feminism has sought to become integrally related to struggles against racial and colonial oppression, it has become increasingly important to resist the colonizing epistemological strategy that would subordinate different configurations of domination under the rubric of a transcultural notion of patriarchy. (35)

Seeing all men's relationships as contributing to patriarchy, which assures the privileging of men and the oppressing of women, Sedgwick relies on such a totalizing model of masculinity--patriarchy--a reliance which undermines her wish to establish a "more different, more complicated" means of analyzing the nature of gender relations. By applying Sedgwick's method of reading the representation of women to the representation of men we can, without losing sight of the fact that men as a group do oppress women as a group, begin to explore issues of oppression *between* men and theorize what sociologist

R. W. Connell's describes as the "gender politics within masculinity" (37).

Michael Kimmel, sociologist and National Spokesperson of N.O.M.A.S. (The National Organization for Men Against Sexism), argues that masculinity is most effectively approached through what he and others term "Profeminism, a position that acknowledges men's experience without privileging it" and that acknowledges both "the power of men as a group over women as a group, and the power of some men over other men" (1998, 64). Kimmel argues that "Disaggregating the term masculinity into its plural masculinities is one way to address that second dimension of power. Some men are disempowered by virtue of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, able-bodiedness. But all men are privileged vis-a-vis women" (1998, 64). Challenging an essentialist model of "masculinity" as a set of traits inherent to men, the concept of masculinities suggests, in Michael Uebels words,

> a polysemy denying the autonomy and stability of male identity as it claims to specify and interpret masculine self-perception, performativity and existence. The term brings into play the profound multiplicity and conditional status of the historical experience of male subjects. Masculinity becomes not a defining quality of men, of their fantasies and real experiences of self and other, but one coordinate of their identity that exists in a constant dialectical relation with other coordinates. (4)

Problematizing the increasingly "transcultural notion of patriarchy" described by Butler, without denying the fact of men's privilege over women, the concept of "masculinities" allows for a more subtle analysis of how the multiple axes of class, gender, race, and sexuality interact to create complex gender asymmetries within a particular socio-historical context.

Adopting a "masculinities" model which recognizes the issues of power between men is an important step in theorizing the complexity of gender relations, but as R. W. Connell warns, "it is necessary to keep the analysis dynamic, to prevent the acknowledgment of multiple masculinities collapsing into a character typology." Connell argues that an emphasis on exploring multiple masculinities "is welcome, but it risks another kind of oversimplification. It is easy in this framework to think that there is *a*

black masculinity or *a* working-class masculinity" (76). To prevent this sort of oversimplification, Connell discusses masculinity "as a configuration of practice *within* a system of gender relations" (84), arguing for example that "'Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (76). Connell describes several "practices" which determine the shape of gender relations between men--"subordination" of gay men across the axes of class, race and ethnicity; "complicity" by men who "realize the patriarchal dividend without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy" (79); "marginalization" which "refer[s] to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups" and which "is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (80-1). In describing these "practices," Connell emphasizes "that terms such as 'hegemonic masculinity' or 'marginalized masculinities' name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships. Any theory of masculinity worth having must give an account of this process of change" (81). Connell's emphasis on exploring "configurations of practice," rather than fixed subject positions, enables us to recognize that the perception and reality of men's privilege are not fixed: depending on context a man can be both oppressor and oppressed.

With Connell's theory in mind, we can begin to apply to patriarchy the insights that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has into the complexity of the oppression of women and gay men: "*not* [...] all oppressions are congruent, but [...] are *differently* structured and so must intersect in complex embodiments," a "realization [which] has as its corollary that the comparison of different axes of oppression is a crucial task, not for any purpose of ranking oppressions, but to the contrary because each oppression is likely to be in a uniquely indicative relation to certain distinctive nodes of cultural organization" (1990, 33). A working-class heterosexual African American may subordinate a middle-class gay white man through homophobic verbal or physical abuse while at the same time recognizing the gay man's economic privilege. Or, as Connell explains, "in the United States, particular black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. But the

fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally" (81). Affluent young white males may wish to emulate the skills and achievements and accumulate the wealth of African American athletes like Michael Jordan or Kobe Bryant, whom these young men admire as role models, but at the same time the majority of African American men continue to fight to overcome marginalization and achieve a sense of masculinity and the privileges that they believe accompany that masculine ideal.

Discussing the reasons that African American men often reinscribe the model of masculinity they have traditionally been denied, sociologist Michael Messner explains that "The dominant theme in the discourse of racialized masculinity politics in the United States has tended primarily to be concerned with the need to strongly assert men of color's rightful claims to 'manhood' as a means of resisting white men's racial (and often also, simultaneously, social class) domination of men of color." Messner argues that because men of color have traditionally been so focused on attaining their manhood in the eyes of white society, a "profeminist voice among men of color--though extremely important--is still quite rare"(71). And while African American men fight to overcome marginalization and gain a sense of masculinity, African American feminists like bell hooks argue that there is a hegemonic model of African American masculinity which is finally complicitous to a broader patriarchal model of hegemonic masculinity:

> Growing up in a black community where there were individual black men who critiqued normative masculinity, who repudiated patriarchy and its concommitant support of sexism, I fully appreciate that it is a tremendous loss that there is little known of their ideas about black masculinity. Without documentation of their presence, it has been easier for black men who embrace patriarchal masculinity, phallocentrism, and sexism to act as though they speak for all black men. Since their representations of black masculinity are in complete agreement with white culture's assessment, they do not threaten or challenge white domination, they reinscribe it.
>
> (1992, 98).[1]

These same complex issues of authorization and subordination exist not only

within the context of race, class, and sexuality, but also *within* the gay community. As Michael A. Messner explains,

> the idea that there is *a* gay male experience that has formed the basis of *the* gay community was a key to the development of a successful and empowering gay politics of identity. But this normalized gay identity was based on a falsely universalized white, upper middle-class, and highly masculine gay male experience, thus tending to render invisible the experiences of lesbians, gay men of color, poor and working-class gay men, and effeminate gay men. (87)

In "Chapter Six," I will discuss the issues of marginalization, subordination, hegemony, and the struggle for identity as experienced by Ralph Ellison's African American male narrator in *Invisible Man* and by Andrew Holleran's white, middle-class gay narrator in *Dancer From the Dance*.

Assumed Subjectivity: Nostalgia and Traditional Masculinity

> Parnell (an upper middle-class Southern white newspaper owner) to Meridian (an African American minister): "please try to understand that it is not so easy to leap over fences, to give things up--all right, to surrender privilege! But if you were among the privileged you would know what I mean. It's not a matter of trying to hold on; the things, the privilege--are part of you, of who you are. It's in the gut."
>
> --James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie* (58-9)

The idea that someone can be both privileged in one social context and oppressed in another, or can at least perceive oneself as oppressed, is a valuable concept in discussing what I will term "traditional masculinity," a configuration of practice which is related to hegemonic masculinity yet distinct in its portrayal of itself as oppressed and victimized, despite the privileged social and economic position of those who argue for this model of masculinity. R. W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity "as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of

patriarchy" (77), and while this "position [is] always contestable" (76), hegemonic masculinity has proven it can reshape itself to absorb challenges to its position of privilege. As cultural theorist Andrew Ross argues, "the reason why patriarchy remains so powerful is due less to its entrenched traditions than to its versatile capacity to shape-change and morph the contours of masculinity to fit with shifts in the social climate" (172).

Like hegemonic masculinity, traditional masculinity also exists in various forms--the right-wing Christian Promise Keepers; the "moral majority" who want men at work and women in the home; those "rebels" who long for a sense of freedom and self-determination away from society's oppression, which is the form I will focus on--but unlike hegemonic masculinity, traditional masculinity is defined not by its ability to change, but by its reliance on a nostalgia for "entrenched traditions" of masculine identity. Arguments for a return to a traditional masculinity usually arise from a disillusionment with hegemonic masculinity, proponents looking back longingly to an earlier, highly mythologized time when they believe masculine roles and values were supposedly fixed, clearly understood and embraced by society. What traditional masculinity thus defines as a "crisis in masculinity" is, in fact, a perceived threat to what Michael Kimmel describes as a "sense of entitlement," the ability "to claim their birthright to power" (1998, 65), and what I will call an "assumed subjectivity." Crises in masculinity occur whenever structurally privileged men begin to perceive themselves as oppressed, their assumed subjectivity threatened by social and economic changes. Yet, this threat is rarely represented in historical terms, and is instead usually perceived as resulting from gains made by women and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities who, in struggling to overcome a history of exclusion and domination, are portrayed as responsible for a decline in society and the victimization felt by straight, white men.[2]

A central feature of traditional masculinity is its reliance on nostalgia. Sociologist Fred Davis, in his book *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, explains that nostalgia "always occurs in the context of fear, discontents, anxieties or uncertainties" (34). Perceiving a threat to their privilege, and thus their identity, proponents of traditional masculinity respond with "the celebration of now ostensibly lost values, the sense of some ineffable spirit of worth or goodness having escaped time, the conviction

that, no matter how advanced the present may be, ... it is in some sense meaner and baser" (20-21). Clearly, this nostalgic response results from present emotional needs which allow the individual to consciously or subconsciously misremember, and thus idealize, the past. As Janice Doane and Devon Hodges argue,

> In nostalgic writings, the opposition past/present accumulates crucially important meanings [and ...] the term past is attached to other terms to make it the locus of authenticity. So vivid does this constructed past become that the rhetorical strategies used to create it seem to disappear. Nostalgic writers are entrapped by the illusion that their opposition creates: the mythic pasts become real. (9)

The belief in a crisis in masculinity is always already informed by nostalgia, because believing in the reality of an idealized past establishes a normalized point of reference against which to judge present realities. Nostalgically mythologizing the past into "the good old days" when men had privilege and women were happy in their place thus both creates and justifies the belief in a present crisis in masculinity.

The nostalgic belief that in the past men and women had fixed sex roles and society functioned in a practical and harmonious manner reflects the desire to establish an ahistorical, originary masculinity which naturalizes white, heterosexual male privilege. Nostalgia allows those arguing for a traditional model of male identity to posit an essentialist, expressivist model of masculinity which they argue existed in the past but has been undermined in the present, leading to the alienation and victimization of men, by which they mean men who traditionally have enjoyed a sense of social privilege. Although this model of masculinity is ahistorical and mythic, the belief in an originary masculinity nevertheless acts as a fixed referent against which to measure the decline of society and the undermining of masculinity. And as Doane and Hodges explain, "In the nostalgic mode of articulation, the referent plays a crucial role: it acts as an authentic origin or centre from which to disparage the degenerate present and as the 'truth' behind stereotypical sexual oppositions" (8). The men who argue for a return to a traditional ideal of masculinity do not want to believe that, in Judith Butler's words, "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed,"

that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its result" (25). Those who argue for a return to traditional masculinity believe that masculinity is inherent, and brings with it inherent rights and privileges which are threatened by changes in society, changes which challenge the privileges, and thus the identity, of white, heterosexual men.

Given the mythic, ahistorical quality of traditional masculinity, historicizing the crises which supposedly threaten this ideal of masculinity inevitably challenges many of the beliefs which underlie this construction of male identity. By exploring the representation of white, male heterosexual experience in several twentieth-century narratives by men, I can attempt to situate within the author's particular socio-historical context the perception of a crisis in masculinity which the author portrays. Rather than simply denying the existence of a crisis, I wish to ask: What is the author's ideal of masculinity and how is it represented in the narrative? What social, historical, and economic changes are occurring which are perceived as threatening traditional masculinity and male identity? How are these changes represented in the narrative, and if the author portrays the victimization of heterosexual white men, how is this victimization portrayed and who is the victimizer? How does this portrayal both reflect and contribute to a traditional ideal of masculinity and male privilege? Reading these narratives through a "masculinities" approach to gender practices, I can explore how the popularity of the narratives I have chosen stems from their reproducing stereotypical assumptions about women, and racial and sexual minorities in order to affirm a nostalgic ideal of traditional American masculinity.

(In) Between Men: Narration, Homophobia and "Homosocial Mediation"

I have chosen to explore traditional masculinity and representations of crises in masculinity through four popular twentieth-century narratives which have been read as reproducing the traditional American theme of the individual who quests, often tragically, for freedom outside an oppressive society. I have chosen these particular works because in each, the author employs a first-person male narrator who recounts his experiences with a male hero whom the narrator portrays as symbolizing a traditional ideal of masculinity threatened by

society. Although my treatment of this narrative form has been influenced by the work of other critics, whom I shall discuss briefly, my approach differs from theirs in that I explore how masculinity and homophobia influence the narrator's nostalgic recounting of his relationship with the now absent hero.

In a 1979 essay entitled "Observer-Hero Narrative," Laurence Buell identifies a genre which he refers to as "observer-hero narrative," and defines as

> a story told by a dramatized first person narrator about a significant relationship or encounter he has had with another person. The figures are both opposites and counterparts, the second person perceived both as contrasting with the first in outlook or life-style and as embodying in purer or more extreme form qualities which the observer has or sympathizes with in moderation. The observer's world seems more like our world, while the second person's seems more intensely focused and more romantic by comparison. (93)

Buell's goals are to define this genre and explore its characteristics, suggest novels which fit into the genre and, finally, describe the genealogy of this narrative form, which he argues is "the product of two prominent, complimentary trends in Western literature since the Renaissance: the gradual disappearance of the traditional hero, and the rise of interest in subjective consciousness as a literary subject" (103).

Influenced by Buell's essay, Kenneth Bruffee, in his book *Elegiac Romance: Cultural Change and Loss of the Hero in Modern Fiction* (1983), sets out to identify and define a genre which is distinct from, but related to, the genre of the "observer-hero narrative." Bruffee situates "elegaic romance" historically within the tradition of modernism, arguing that "the elegiac romance tradition is important because it provides a complex, flexible form for expressing many themes central to modernism and the modern sensibility" (26). Bruffee argues that the narrator describes his anxieties with modern life--loss of faith in religion, heroism, society and the resulting psychological and spiritual trauma--and overcomes them through retelling his experiences with the novel's hero. Focusing on defining a specific genre, Bruffee emphasizes that

> The underlying problem the narrator faces as the novel begins and the

> change he undergoes as he attempts to solve it by telling the tale are what distinguish elegiac romance from other observer-hero narratives. The problem the narrator faces is that although the hero is now dead or irretrievably lost, his hero's influence remains unaccountably alive in the narrator's mind. The narrator attempts to solve this problem by coming to terms, through telling the tale, with the debilitating influence that his hero continues to exert over him. (28)

Bruffee suggests that the elegaic romance focuses on the hero's continuing influence on the narrator who struggles to establish the significance of the hero's life and the hole his absence creates in the narrator's life. Faced with a general loss of faith, the narrator turns to the hero, and to his own narrative, to find a sense of meaning.

Although David H. Lynn mentions neither Buell or Bruffee in his book *The Hero's Tale: Narrators in the Early Modern Novel* (1990), Lynn also explores the narrator/hero relationship as rendered through several early twentieth-century novels which incorporate observer-hero narratives. Like Bruffee, Lynn situates this narrative genre within the historical and literary tradition of modernism, arguing that unlike the traditional "novels of moral realism," "the focus of these novels shifts to the experience of the narrators themselves" (3). Interested more in the cultural and philosophical context of these novels than in defining a particular literary genre, Lynn argues that the early modern novels he discusses "are all frame narratives during which the values and ideals of the past century--capitalism, colonialism, liberal faith in progress, and so on--are revealed as illusory and corrupt. They can no longer sustain the secure norms which shaped earlier frames" (3). According to Lynn, the hero cannot survive this loss of illusion, but

> With the romantic hero destroyed by his own naive egoism in conflict with the barren social environment, each of these narrators, though himself partly lamed by the relativism of irony, assumes the role of the hero and transforms it. The new moral dualism of scepticism and faith structures the tale he tells. That tale, in turn, is his heroic act, his attempt to translate his experience into language so that his audience will in some way share it and the moral education he passes on. (4)

Lynn believes that the narrator in each novel he describes gains insight through his experiences with the hero, and "comes to see, and thus to shape, the world in terms that we can call *general irony*" (4), a perspective that also shapes his narrative.

These critics identify and discuss the structural and rhetorical features and issues surrounding observer-hero narratives, and both Bruffee and Lynn effectively situate the narratives they discuss within a context of modernism. And while their ideas have definitely influenced my reading of the narratives I discuss, none of these critics address the fact that in almost all of the narratives they discuss, the narrator and hero are both men. As a result, these critics do not explore the social or psychological implications of gender in shaping the relationship with the hero that the narrator recounts. In discussing what I refer to as "narratives of homosocial mediation," my interest lies in exploring the social and psychological dynamics which are revealed through this relationship between an active, adventurous male hero and a more passive, thoughtful male narrator. In addition to exploring the complexity of the hero/narrator relationship by historicizing the narrative and situating narrator and hero in terms of class, race, ethnicity, age, education, and sexuality, I am also interested in exploring what remains unsaid, except through recollection and narrative, between these two men: in other words, how their relationship is shaped by homophobia.

In our society, homophobia defines the relationships between men for it limits the ways in which men can communicate and interact with one another. As Gregory K. Lehne explains,

> The male role is maintained predominantly by men themselves. Men devalue homosexuality, then use this norm of homophobia to control other men in their male roles. Since any man could potentially (latently) be a homosexual, and since there are certain social sanctions that can be directed against homosexuals, the fear of being labeled a homosexual can be used to ensure that males maintain appropriate male behavior. Homophobia is only incidentally directed against actual homosexuals--its more common use is against the heterosexual male. This explains why homophobia is closely related to beliefs about sex-role rigidity, but not to

> personal experience with homosexuals or to any realistic assessment of homosexuality itself. Homophobia is a threat used by societies and individuals to enforce social conformity in the male role, and maintain social control. The taunt "*What* are you, a fag?" is used in many ways to encourage certain types of behavior and to define the limits of "acceptable" masculinity. (389)

Socialized to believe that "men are openly allowed to express anger and hostility, but not sensitivity and sympathy" because "The expression of more tender emotions among men is thought to be characteristic only of homosexuals" (Lehne 391), men often will mediate their relationships with other men with sports, social or business activities, or other socially acceptable forms of interaction which involve actions, shared goals, or depersonalized conversation. Taught to fear any expression of intimacy with other men, "males best relate with one another on the basis of shared experiences, such as sports or work, rather than shared details of one another's personal life" (Strikwerda and May 88). Homophobia also influences each narrator's need to mediate, through the safety of nostalgia and narrative, his feelings for the hero whose story he tells, feelings he cannot express directly to the hero.

Each of the narrators I discuss experiences a mediated relationship with the hero, and then later describes his relationship with, and feelings for, the hero through the act of remembering and arranging those memories into a narrative. Nick and Gatsby's relationship is mediated by Gatsby's quest to win Daisy, and Gatsby asks for Nick's help because he is related to Daisy and thus represents a means for Gatsby to meet her again "by chance." Sal and Dean are brought together by a shared wish to travel, meet women and find "kicks" on the road. McMurphy's rebelliousness motivates Chief Bromden and the other men in the asylum to work together to overthrow, or at least undermine, the character that McMurphy convinces them, and the reader, is their enemy: Nurse Ratched. And baseball brings together Ray, his father, and the other men who are all looking to the past to find a sense of meaning and fulfillment in their lives. Unable to recognize the significance of the hero in his life while the hero is present, or unable to express his feelings of affection or gratitude directly to the hero, each narrator finally expresses his

feelings of loss, gratitude and affection only after the hero is absent, as in *On the Road*, or dead, as in *The Great Gatsby*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *Field of Dreams*. In each of these narratives, the narrator nostalgically recounts his experiences with the hero, transforming the hero from a man into a symbol of a purer American masculine ideal, thus rendering the hero less human and more idea. The narrative is a tribute to the hero, the narrator's attempt to explain to others the value and lasting influence of the hero's character, actions, and ideals, yet as a tribute to an absent hero the narrative is a safe means of expressing the narrator's feeling of affection and gratitude. Through memories recounted in a narrative which appears in the hero's absence, the narrator portrays his feelings for the hero and expresses the importance to him of their relationship; the narrator can finally say *about* the hero what he could not comfortably say *to* the hero in words.

Notes

1. For a detailed and wide-ranging discussion of African American male perception of white masculinity and how it relates to feelings of privilege and a sense of identity in mainstream culture, see Philip Brian Harper's *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*. For an African American woman's critique of the reinscribing of white mainstream masculine ideals and prejudices by African American men during the fight for minority rights in the late sixties and seventies, see Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*.

2. See David Savran's *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* for a discussion of how and why different groups of white men are perceiving themselves as victimized, and how they are working to overcome that feeling of victimization.

CHAPTER TWO: "Ceaselessly into the Past": Nick Carraway's Elegy on the Self-Made Man

Few scholars would deny the place of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* at or near the centre of the American literary canon. Few works in American literature have received the critical attention given to *The Great Gatsby*, critics praising the novel for its beauty, complexity and insight. Matthew Bruccoli, the most prolific Fitzgerald scholar, argues that "*The Great Gatsby* does not proclaim the nobility of the human spirit; it is not politically correct; it does not reveal how to solve the problems of life; it delivers no fashionable or comforting messages. It is just a masterpiece" (1992, vii). Bruccoli implies that as a "masterpiece," *The Great Gatsby*'s value somehow transcends time, place, and changes in social and literary values and critical practices, an idea critic Richard Lehan states explicitly:

> *The Great Gatsby* seems larger than the criteria that we bring to its evaluation; whatever we say about it seems never complete or satisfactory enough. It is a novel that has continually proved itself larger than its many critics, which is perhaps what we mean when we speak of it as a masterpiece. When the canon of American literature changes, the criteria we use to establish that canon change as well. Literary posterity is always a fragile thing, but challenges to the permanence of *The Great Gatsby* seem to cast more doubt on our critical criteria than they do on Fitzgerald's achievement. (15)

Lehan's belief that *The Great Gatsby* somehow transcends "critical criteria" seems questionable when one discovers that the novel has not always held its current canonical status, and that when it first appeared it enjoyed neither the critical nor commercial success of Fitzgerald's first two novels--*This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and the Damned*--which are now perceived as greatly inferior to *The Great Gatsby*. As Bruccoli explains, "Copies of the 1925 second printing [of *The Great Gatsby*] were still in the warehouse when Fitzgerald died in 1940" (1985, 4). It was not until after Fitzgerald's death that there began a popular interest in his life,[1] while "Critical assessment of the novel

was mainly a process of the fifties" (Bruccoli 1985, 5). To establish Fitzgerald's reputation, and the value of *The Great Gatsby*, critics had to show that Fitzgerald was more than simply a chronicler of the twenties who lived the frivolous life he portrayed in his novels and short stories,[2] and that *The Great Gatsby* was more than simply "'a book about the Roaring Twenties'" (Bruccoli 1985, 6).

The argument that *The Great Gatsby* was far more than simply a novel which captured a historical moment began with Lionel Trilling's influential book, *The Liberal Imagination* (1951). Trilling argued that "*The Great Gatsby* has its interest as a record of contemporary manners but this might have only served to date it, did not Fitzgerald take the given moment of history as something more than mere circumstance, did he not, in the manner of the great French novelists of the nineteenth century, seize the given moment as a moral fact" (251). Trilling helped determine how later critics would approach the novel by discussing "its form and style" and by establishing the symbolic importance of its hero: according to Trilling "Gatsby, divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand for America itself" (251). Many critics have developed and expanded on Trilling's reading of the symbolic meaning and literary importance of *The Great Gatsby* in the last fifty years, and it is this belief that Fitzgerald somehow captured the essence of American culture that has helped make "*The Great Gatsby* an American--indeed, a world--classic, a persistent and permanent presence in American culture" (Anderson 37).

My interest in *The Great Gatsby* does not involve arguing whether the novel deserves a place in the American literary canon; rather, I am interested in historicizing the novel in order to explore how Fitzgerald represented the social and economic changes which were reshaping how American men understood the traditional myths of self-making and the "American Dream," myths which shaped how men believed they could fulfill the expectations which defined American masculinity. The twenties were a time of cultural transition greatly influenced by the economic shift away from an agrarian and toward a consumer culture, and thus away from a masculine ideal defined by personal character and hard work. Faced with this economic transformation, as well as with a recently closed frontier, young men like Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway were drawn to the city, especially New York, and the new opportunities in business and management to be found there.

Through Gatsby and Nick, Fitzgerald explores the economic and social changes taking place in American society: changes in how men made and used money, and changes in where and how young men established careers that would help them chase what was a changing vision of the American Dream. I will argue that if Gatsby represents America, he represents a historically particular, rural, poor, male America experiencing the growing influence of advertising and consumerism on how Americans conceived success and self-making, two defining characteristics of traditional American masculinity. Nick Carraway represents particular changes in early twentieth-century America as experienced by a young, somewhat idealistic, middle-class man who recognizes that the dream Gatsby tries to make real is no longer possible, and that behind the myth of the self-made man lie corruption, class prejudice, and the aggressive, brutal masculinity of Tom Buchanan.

Against this backdrop of social and economic change, Fitzgerald portrays the interactions between three men whose different backgrounds have shaped their assumptions about masculinity. The three main male characters all come from the Midwest, leaving differences in social class as the primary determinant of the very different masculine ideals which influence the actions and expectations of Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, and Nick Carraway. Jay Gatsby is the fictional creation of James Gatz and represents Gatz' belief in the self-made man. Influenced by a mix of self-help guides, millionaire biographies, and the growing field of advertising, Gatz remakes himself into Jay Gatsby whose mix of wealth, style, and politeness Gatz believes comprise the upper-class masculine ideal he believes will help him win Daisy, the woman whom he was too poor to marry years before. Tom Buchanan, the present husband of Daisy and the man away from whom Gatsby must win Daisy, represents a very different masculine ideal, one that Nick vilifies rather than celebrates. Tom's aggressive, virile masculinity stands in sharp contrast to Gatsby's masculine ideal, Tom motivated by self-interest and a lack of morality and imagination, rather than by the grand ideals which Nick believes motivate Gatsby.

Between Gatsby and Tom, Fitzgerald places Nick Carraway, the middle-class narrator who shares some of Gatsby's romantic ideals, but who also remains thoroughly grounded in the middle-class masculine ideals of honesty, reserve, and objectivity. It is through Nick's eyes and middle-class ideals that we judge the drama which unfolds

between Gatsby and Tom, as Nick discovers that behind the charms and excitement of the wealthy-by-inheritance, represented by Tom, lie carelessness and a need to undermine the efforts of those like Gatsby who aspire to share their wealth and social position. *The Great Gatsby* chronicles Nick Carraway's post-war "restlessness" and search for meaning outside the comforts of his Midwestern, middle-class home, and by exploring why Nick goes east to New York and why he eventually returns to the Midwest, we can begin to understand why Nick chooses to make a hero of Gatsby and a villain of Tom, and thus chooses to celebrate a model of masculinity very different than either Tom's virile masculinity or his own reserved, middle-class masculine ideal. Nick's narrative reveals his need to make sense of Gatsby and reflects Nick's nostalgia for a mythic past when a man like James Gatz could dream and remake himself in an America "commensurate to his capacity to wonder" (189).

Go East, Young Man: Redefining the Self-Made Man

Through his early novels and short stories, F. Scott Fitzgerald helped establish the stereotypical image of the twenties in America, which he dubbed "the Jazz Age": a decade of flappers, drinking and parties, "an age of excess" when "a whole race [went] hedonistic, deciding on pleasure" (Fitzgerald 1956, 14, 15). Reacting to the horrors of World War One and feeling little faith in humanity or government, a "lost generation" felt, in Edmund Wilson's words, that "in such a civilization as this, the sanest and most honorable course is to escape from organized society and live for the excitement of the moment" (34). In his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald articulated the younger generation's feelings of alienation: "Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through a revery of long days and nights; finally destined to go out into the dirty grey turmoil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" (259-60). Discussing Fitzgerald's second novel *The Beautiful and the Damned* shortly after its publication, Edmund Wilson concluded that "it may be that we cannot demand too high a degree of moral balance from young men, however able or brilliant, who write books in the year 1921: we have to remember that they have had to

grow up in, that they have had to derive their chief stimulus from the wars, the society and the commerce of the Age of Confusion itself" (35).

Fitzgerald and Wilson both describe World War One as a prime contributor to "the Age of Confusion," but they also mention the role of economics in the changes faced by the younger generation who struggled to find meaning in the twenties. Fitzgerald describes "a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success" and Wilson suggests that changes in "commerce" have contributed to unbalancing the morals of young men. Challenging the idea that World War One was wholly responsible for the decadence and cynicism of the twenties, historian Roderick Nash argues that the twenties were a time of transition when "a nervous generation grop[ed] for what certainty they could find," some by holding "tightly to the traditional moorings of traditional custom and values," others by seeking "new ways of understanding and ordering their existence" (2).[3] According to Nash, this feeling of "nervousness" was caused by the broad social and economic changes that were reshaping American society and cultural values:

> Many Americans felt uneasy as they experienced the transforming effects of population growth, urbanization and economic change. On the one hand, these developments were welcome as steps in the direction of progress. Yet they also raised vague fears about the passing of frontier conditions, the loss of national vigor, and the eclipse of the individual in a mass society. Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt, among others, had pointed to the liabilities of the transformation at the turn of the century. World War I underscored the misgivings and doubts. By the 1920s the sense of change had penetrated to the roots of popular thought. Scarcely an American was unaware that the frontier had vanished and that pioneering, in the traditional sense, was a thing of the past. (126-7)

America had always mythologized the frontier as a place of infinite possibility, a place where a man could escape the feminizing influence of the East and rediscover his masculinity through hard work and honest effort. In his famous 1893 address to the American Historical Association, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History,"

Frederick Jackson Turner described the American frontier as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (3), a place which fostered "that coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes from freedom" (37).[4] The old American myth had always entreated the young man to go west to build his character, discover his true manhood, and make his fortune, but in the beginning of the twentieth century Turner and others perceived the West as no longer the place of freedom and opportunity it once had been. Young men still moved away from the small towns and villages where they were born and raised, but instead of heeding Horace Greeley's famous command to "go west, young man," most young men now headed east to the big cities and the growing world of business.

America in the early twentieth century was transforming from an agrarian economy to an economy focused on commerce and consumerism. According to Malcolm Cowley, "Selling rather than producing had become the problem and the purpose of the age. It was a time when salesmen flourished as never before; a time when they waged campaigns like generals and occupied the land as an invading army" (2). As historian Michael Parrish explains, faced with the supposed closure of the American frontier, and living in an "era of assembly lines, large-scale bureaucracies, routinized labor, and standardized products," those who still believed in the American myth of rugged masculine individualism began to fear for "the survival of individualism in a world characterized increasingly by impersonal organizations and social relationships":

> A consumer culture that condoned hedonism and challenged the primacy of the work ethic heightened for many the old questions about personal identity and spiritual integrity in a society where the market appeared to structure and dominate human relationships. Did individual consumption constitute both the means and ends of existence? A consumer culture that daily put affluence on display in magazines, radio, and motion pictures also raised to a new level of intensity the old questions about economic equality

> and fairness, both staples of American political debate since the eighteenth century. (158, x-xi)

Dedicating his novel *The Virginian* (1902) to Theodore Roosevelt, who had advocated for young men the strenuous life of the west as a cure to the feminizing influence of the East, Owen Wister portrayed the frontier as a place where individual ability outweighed social position as determining a man's future. Wister helped mythologize the frontier and the cowboy at the very moment they were disappearing from history; in the "Preface" to *The Virginian*, Wister explains that the frontier he nostalgically portrays "is a vanished world. No journeys, save those which memory can take, will bring you to it now" and that "the horseman with his pasturing thousands [...] will never come again. He rides in his historic yesterday" (6). Like Roosevelt, Wister longed for a return to "the strenuous life," and he shared with many other writers and social theorists the belief that the world of society and business was detrimental to men, destroying their vigour and leaving them physically and spiritually weak.[5]

While Wister felt that the economic changes of the early twentieth century would destroy the masculine cultural values on which America was founded and built, most people embraced the growth of business, seeing it as part of another American myth: progress. Seeking ways to capitalize on these social and economic changes, American businessmen helped create what historian Ellis W. Hawley describes as an "organizational revolution" which focused on the importance of money and how to manage it:

> Institutionally [...] the America of the prewar period was a society reorganizing around functional identities, shifting power to new organizational elites, and forging rationalizations to justify these changes. For better or for worse, the land that had idealized yeoman farmers and rugged individualists was becoming a land of corporate organization, bureaucratic systemizers, and associational activities. And while some believed that the new forms of association must necessarily lead either to a new tyranny or to a socialist commonwealth, the more general assumption was that they could be contained within the framework of liberal democracy. (8-9)

Despite its emphasis on bureaucracy and management, business was hailed as the latest means by which the young man could achieve wealth and thus personal fulfillment. Mythologizing the world of commerce and the men who dominated it, magazine biographers wrote stories about the rise of businessmen like Carnegie and Rockefeller which, as cultural historian Thomas Greene explains, left "little doubt that business was the true field for the modern American hero" (156). Business was the new, urban version of the traditional American Dream, and "Any young American calculating his chances for personal fame in various occupations could thus conclude from the magazines that business offered the greatest opportunity for making a mark in his world" (156-7).

Sinclair Lewis portrayed this new American faith in business in his 1922 novel *Babbitt*. Like Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* in the fifties, Babbitt gave a new term to the lexicon of twenties American culture--the Babbitt--for his main character George F. Babbitt embodied the values, beliefs and shortcomings of the American businessman:

> They went profoundly into the science of business, and indicated that the purpose of manufacturing a plow or a brick was so that it might be sold. To them, the Romantic hero was no longer the knight, the wandering poet, the cowpuncher, the aviator, nor the brave young district attorney, but the great sales-manager, who had an Analysis of Merchandizing Problems on his glass-topped desk, whose title of nobility was "Go-getter," and who devoted himself and all his young samurai to the cosmic purpose of Selling--not of selling anything in particular, for or to anybody in particular, but pure selling. (127-8)

For men like George Babbitt, the problems of post-war America would be solved by the science of management and by putting the affairs of business in order. Discussing the Republican Party, George asks a friend "'Who'll they nominate for president? Don't you think it's time we had a real business administration?'" His friend and fellow businessman replies, "'In my opinion, what this country needs, first and foremost, is a good, sound, business-like conduct of affairs. What it needs is--a business administration'" (23).

This image of the new hero as a "Go-getter" was the latest manifestation of the

ideal of the self-made man, the American hero who relies on hard work and action to achieve wealth. In a speech to the "Zenith Real Estate Board," George explains this new definition of a real American man:

> "the ideal of American manhood and culture isn't a lot of cranks sitting around chewing the rag about their Rights and their Wrongs, but a God-fearing, hustling, successful, two-fisted regular guy, who belongs to some church with pep and piety to it, who belongs to the Boosters or the Rotarians or the Kiwanis, to the Elks or Moose or Red Men or Knights of Columbus or anyone of a score of organizations of good, jolly, kidding, laughing, sweating, upstanding, lend-a-hand Royal Good Fellows, who plays hard and works hard, and whose answer to his critics is a square-toed boot that'll teach the grouches and smart alecks to respect the He-man and get out and root for old Uncle Samuel, U.S.A.!" (168-9).

George's "ideal of American manhood" still involves hard work, but it now also involves becoming a member of the community, a joiner rather than an individualist, a contributor to the society that the traditional American hero sought to escape. The ideal is now to be a "regular guy," someone who fits in with the group while at the same time making their mark in the world of business.

"Everybody I knew was in the bond business"

Sinclair Lewis is clearly sympathetic to his main character; nevertheless, *Babbitt* is not a celebration of this new focus on business, but instead portrays how men like George Babbitt rely on a combination of almost religious faith in business[6] and a need to be accepted as "a regular fellow" whose ideas fit in with those of other businessmen. Yet, Lewis suggests that behind this facade of speeches and boosterism lies a feeling of emptiness and frustration with business. George's friend Paul, who should have been a concert violinist but instead has gone into selling, openly states what George feels but is unwilling, or unable, to admit:

> "Take all these fellows we know [...] that seem to be perfectly content with their home-life and their business [...]. I bet if you cut into their heads

> you'd find that one-third of 'em are sure-enough satisfied with their wives and kids and friends and their offices; and one-third feel kind of restless but won't admit it; and one-third are miserable and know it. They hate the whole peppy, boosting, go-ahead game, and they're bored by their wives and think their families are fools [...] and they hate business and they'd go--Why do you think there's so many 'mysterious' suicides? Why do you suppose so many Substantial Citizens jumped right into the war? Think it was all patriotism?" (57)

George is one of these men bored with business, longing for escape and "dreaming of the fairy child" who "cried that he was gay and valiant, that she would wait for him, that they would sail" (2). George escapes to the woods of Maine, and later into the alcohol and parties of the more bohemian citizens of Zenith, but he finally returns to the safety and security of his wife, family, business, and clubs, once again becoming the regular fellow he celebrated as his masculine ideal.

Like the men Paul describes who joined the war to get away from their family and business responsibilities, Nick Carraway "jumped right into the war," but Nick never explains his motives. Unlike Nick's great-uncle, who "sent a substitute to the Civil War and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today" (7), Nick decides to leave the Midwest for Europe and "that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War" (7), leaving us to wonder whether Nick went to war for "patriotism" or to get away from a secure place waiting for him in his father's business. Whatever his motives for going to war, we know that Nick

> enjoyed the counterraid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe--so I decided to go east and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business so I supposed it could support one more single man. (7)

It is clearly Nick's restlessness that leads him to New York, which he sees as an exciting world away from the Midwest and the quiet, middle-class security of his father's small business. Reversing the American myth of seeking freedom and opportunity on the

western frontier, as James Callahan argues,

> Nick Carraway comes East [...] to make his fortune, and thereby himself. True, the stolidity of the Middle West bores him to restlessness. He would have the excitement of a world less charted, more charged. But the metaphor for his identity is economic; he moves from hardware (solid, permanent commodity) to bonds (paper projections of values at a given time contingent upon a certain set of circumstances). (56-7)

Nick escapes to the city as a form of rebellion against the middle-class expectations of his family, and his desire for something new and exciting reveals a romantic imagination which stands in contrast to the reserved, practical masculine ideals of Nick's father. In New York, Nick sees himself as "a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler"(8) in a romantic city which promises professional and personal opportunities and rewards which he imagines more than understand, but which he knows are not available back home.[7]

Unaware of the Babbittry which lies beneath the surface of the business world, Nick excitedly immerses himself in the world of bonds, dreaming of the success he will achieve away on his own terms, away from his father's business. Nick desires to be a self-made man, living the life of the wealthy in New York, so after settling in New York, Nick immediately buys "a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew" (8). And when Nick tells Tom that he is "a bond man" and Tom replies when he is told with whom, "'Never heard of them,'" Nick responds by stating "'You will if you stay in the East,'" (14) showing that he dreams of bigger things for himself and the company for which he works. But neither a new city nor career relieve the restlessness Nick feels in the Midwest because New York, like the bond business, covers its mundane reality with promises of wealth and excitement. Maintaining the traditional ideal of the self-made man, Nick dreams of success through independent effort, but in reality Nick is simply a small cog in a big business machine, one of countless bond men hoping to make their fortune. Of New York Nick says, "the city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world" (73), and

New York is like the wealth and power promised by the world of big business; the reality is far more harsh because it is preceded by the promise:

> I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others--poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner--young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life. (61-2)

Nick is discovering the emptiness of life as a Babbitt and realizing that the myth of the self-made man is no longer relevant in the world of big business. Nick is simply one of many young men who have come to find wealth and power, but are instead finding loneliness and frustration.

Of course, Nick is not really like other "poor young clerks" because he does not need to find a career. Nick's excursion into the world of big business is a means of getting away from home, a vacation which Nick's family agreed to allow and which Nick's "Father agreed to finance [...] for a year" (7). Financially secure and comfortably middle-class, Nick is scornful of the young businessmen whom he sees at Gatsby's party,

> all well-dressed, all looking a little hungry, all talking in low earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were all selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were, at least, agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key. (46)

Faced with the disappointing reality of the bond business, and not possessing the drive and "hunger"-- the competitive masculinity he will come to vilify in Tom--of those whose financial future depends on their business success, Nick not surprisingly becomes decreasingly interested in the world of business and increasingly interested in the lives of

the wealthy people he meets during his summer in New York. Nick never really liked Tom Buchanan when they were at Yale; he is only related to Daisy in a distant way--"second cousin once removed" (10); and he quickly recognizes that Jordan "was incurably dishonest" (63). Nevertheless, Nick is lonely and these are the only people he knows in New York, and their money allows them a lifestyle and a freedom that Nick can only share vicariously, so Nick begins to enjoy the people and places that they can afford while at the same time maintaining a healthy middle-class scorn for what he feels is their decadence.

Class, Wealth and Decadence: Seeing Through Nick's Middle-Class Values

The Great Gatsby is a novel about money and social class, about the decadence of the wealthy, the illusions of a poor young man who strives to achieve wealth without understanding the realities of class difference, and the perceptions of a middle-class narrator who through the experience of telling this young man's story is forced to reassess his own belief in the American myths of classlessness and the self-made man. To understand *The Great Gatsby* and Fitzgerald's choice of middle-class Nick Carraway as narrator, we need to understand Fitzgerald's attitude toward the rich. Fitzgerald came from a middle-class background, but he had known people who were rich, and believed that their wealth made them feel superior while at the same time making them decadent, as he explains in the opening of his story, "The Rich Boy" (1926):

> Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you were born rich, it is very hard to understand. They think, deep in their hearts, that they are better than we are because we had to discover the compensations and refuges of life for ourselves. Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think they are better than we are. They are different. (1-2)

Fitzgerald lived the life of "a privileged outsider" (1981, 233), to use Bruccoli's phrase, a man from the middle-class whose proximity to the rich gave him insight into the effects of wealth, but whose insight and middle-class values had made him critical rather than

envious. In a 1938 letter to a friend, Fitzgerald explained the lasting effects of his relationship with the rich:

> I am going to a costumers in New York and buy Scotty [his daughter] some fancy jewelry so she can pretend they are graduation presents. Otherwise she will have to suffer the shame of being a poor girl in a rich girl's school. That was always my experience--a poor boy in a rich town; a poor boy in a rich boy's school; a poor boy at a rich man's club at Princeton. So I guess she can stand it. However, I have never been able to forgive the rich for being rich, and it has colored my entire life and works.
>
> (Bruccoli, *As Ever* 357)

To emphasize the importance of class difference in his novel, Fitzgerald establishes Nick Carraway as traditionally middle-class in his values. Nick may have come to New York to escape the security of his father's business and to search for a more exciting life and career, but he has clearly internalized his father's middle-class values, including his middle-class assumptions about appropriate male attitudes and behaviour, values which will shape Nick's attitude toward the characters and events of his narrative. Nick immediately establishes his social position--the first thing he tells us about himself is that his "family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this middle-western city for three generations" (7)--and he begins his narrative by remembering advice from his father that reveals his family's sense of moral and economic privilege: "'Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had'" (5). Nick explains that he has followed his father's advice, and that "In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgment" (5). Nick explains that "Reserving judgment is a matter of infinite hope," but also relies on the belief that "a sense of fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth" (6); thus, Nick believes he must make allowances for those who do not possesses his solidly middle-class "fundamental decencies." Nick not only reveals his sense of social and moral privilege, but also establishes what he and his father seem to agree are the ideals of middle-class masculinity. As Frances Kerr explains

> being reserved, drawing upon reserves of understood but never stated

> emotion--these are the characteristics of manhood Nick has learned from his father with whom he shares, he implies, a rare bond. Like his father, Nick projects an upper-middle-class masculinity, taking pride in his patient objectivity, moral discipline, and emotional reserve. (410)

"Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people I have ever known" (64) Nick explains, but Fitzgerald goes out of his way to establish that Nick's honesty, which Nick implies is his objectivity, is an aspect of the middle-class values through which Nick will inevitably perceive his experiences and construct his narrative. As John F. Callahan explains, "Fitzgerald so thoroughly particularizes Carraway and the middle-class stolidity and security of his background and values that we must beware of accepting his generalizations as God-like" (31). Concerned with issues of money and class in early twentieth-century American society, Fitzgerald creates a narrator who is situated socially between the self-indulgent rich and the aspiring, self-making poor. Nick shares neither the cynicism of the former nor the illusions of the latter, but his experiences with Tom and Gatsby--the men who will come to represent to Nick two very different models of masculinity--will reveal to him the realities of class prejudice and force him to question his own financial aspirations, masculine ideals, and belief in the possibility of the traditional American Dream in early twentieth-century America.

The New Old Money: Tom Buchanan's "Cruel Body"

The social and economic changes of early twentieth-century America not only made available new opportunities for men like Nick, but also introduced a new upper-class who replaced the traditional aristocratic emphasis on gentility, politeness, and learning with a focus on how money gives freedom and power over those who are lower in the social hierarchy. Frances Kerr explains how

> In the old American aristocracy of the East, fictionalized by Edith Wharton, the defining component of upper-class manhood was gentility--taste, manners, culture--as much as inherited wealth [...]. Tom Buchanan represents the new American upper class, whose members value money and

> material possessions, not the development of character and taste [...]. He is all physical and material force; he appears to have no emotional interior, and he demonstrates, repeatedly, that he has no manners, taste, or intelligence. (420)

Tom ownership of horses connects him to an aristocratic past and reveals the power of his wealth--Nick explains how Tom had "brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to imagine that any man in my generation was wealthy enough to do that" (10)--but Tom's horses also symbolize Tom's virile masculinity. Tom may wear the traditional riding costume of the aristocrat, but as Nick points out "Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body--he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when he moved under his thin coat" (11). Though Tom defends traditional values when threatened by Gatsby's interest in Daisy, Tom has no greater sense of morality or class expectations to define his actions. Tom sees his money as providing freedom to act as he chooses, and feels no sense of social or class responsibility; he acts in response to his physical needs and wants and intimidates those who may judge him by his wealth and "a body capable of enormous leverage--a cruel body" (11).

Nick's middle-class values clearly colour his perception and representation of Tom Buchanan, whom Nick describes in the most unflattering terms, focusing on his physicality and lack of intelligence and imagination. Nick focuses on the fact that Tom has always had money--"His family were enormously wealth--even in college his freedom with money was a matter of reproach" (10)--and that his money has created in Tom an attitude of superiority which Nick feels symbolizes Tom's idealization of aggressive, virile masculinity. Nick describes how "Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward" and how Tom's

> speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked--and there were men at New Haven that had

hated his guts.

"Now, don't think my opinion on these matters is final," he seemed to say, "just because I am stronger and more of a man than you are." (11)

Tom believes that money cleaned and made respectable over a few generations has given him economic and social solidity, and given him the power over others symbolized by his "cruel body," but what Nick also sees is that the privileges of wealth have made Tom lazy, unimaginative, and narrow-minded.

Tom does not have to worry about money, and thus he does not have to worry about the future. He feels no compunction toward self-improvement or philanthropy, and life holds little mystery for him because his financial future and class position were firmly established before he was born. Consequently, Tom is a man without dreams or aspirations, "one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savours of anti-climax" (10). Revealing his middle-class beliefs about masculine behaviour and character, Nick believes that character in a man is derived from hard work and from having goals and aspirations, so it is not surprising that Nick dislikes Tom, whom he believes will simply "drift on forever seeking a little wistfully for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game" (10). Tom's nostalgia for the past suggests a boredom with the present, as if his money and the things he can buy with it do not give him sufficient pleasure or diversion. Nick recognizes that "something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart" (25), for Tom has been reading "'*The Rise of the Coloured Empires*'" (17, my italics). But Tom clearly does not understand what he has been reading: his attempt to explain the theory the book proposes clearly reveals his limited intelligence and his fear that his privileged social positions is somehow being threatened from below. Nick makes a point of explaining that "There was something pathetic in his concentration as if his complacency, more acute than old, was not enough to him anymore" (18).

Nick further emphasizes Tom's hypocrisy and self-interest by juxtaposing Tom's concern over maintaining social positions with the revelation that Tom has a mistress. Almost inevitably, as Nick later discovers, Tom's mistress is a lower middle-class woman

who has social aspirations like Gatsby, but whom Tom treats as any other object he can buy and use as he pleases. When Myrtle continues saying Daisy's name after Tom told her not to, Tom responds by breaking "her nose with his open hand" (41). Discussing Tom's attitude and behaviour, Patricia Pacey Thornton argues that "Tom's belief in physical force and aggression as solutions to problems both personal (Daisy's bruised hand and Myrtle's broken nose) and universal (white supremacy) links him with the war mentality and the masculine world it represents," yet she points out that "There is, however, no mention of Tom's going to, let alone commanding in, the war as there was with Gatsby and Nick" (459), suggesting that Tom felt neither patriotic nor in need of the excitement and danger of the War. Nick portrays Tom as having little regard for other people, especially people he sees as socially inferior, his only concern being his wealth and the power and privilege it gives him. Nick prides himself on being "slow thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires" (63-4), and what he discovers is the fact that the rich "are different." Disgusted with Tom's selfish disregard for others and his need to prove himself by defeating and destroying Gatsby, Nick reveals his middle-class contempt for the virile, destructive masculinity that defines Tom's character and behaviour:

> I couldn't forgive him or like him but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. (187-8)

Image and Personality: The Self-Made Man in the Age of Advertising

The economic transformation of America in the early twentieth century encouraged young men like Nick Carraway to go east to discover the growing world of business, and the growth of business corresponded with a growth in the influence of advertising and the consumer ethic it reinforced. As economic historian James D. Norris explains,

> Between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the century, conditions in

> the American economy and in society merged to satisfy the necessary pre-conditions for advertising to play a very powerful role in creating national markets [...]. By the time the United States entered World War I, the transformation was complete and the stage set for the triumph of a culture of consumerism. (xv-xvi)

In the late nineteenth century, the nature and purpose of advertising itself underwent a transformation. Advertising had previously been used as a means of providing consumers with information about a particular product but, as cultural historian Alan Trachtenberg explains, "The older function simply to inform had swiftly given way to a mode in which information as such now fused with a message about the product, together with a message about the potential consumer, that he or she *required* the product in order to satisfy a need incited and articulated by the advertisement itself." More than offering simply a consumer product, advertising offered "a spectacle, in which reading and seeing provided access to a presumed and promised reality" (137). Recognizing the social and psychological power of advertisements, President Calvin Coolidge believed advertising to be "the most potent influence in adopting and changing the habits and modes of life, affecting what we eat, what we wear, and the work and play of the whole nation" (qtd. in Parrish 76).[8]

Advertising not only influenced "the habits and modes of life," as Coolidge predicted, it helped redefine the American Dream in clearly material terms. Promising that happiness and social mobility could be achieved through the thoughtful purchase of consumer products, and that anyone could aspire to the image of wealth and good taste, magazine advertisers portrayed a world which "was overwhelmingly upper-middle class and achieved largely through consumption of whatever product was being advertised" (Norris xvii).[9] Playing on the traditional myth of self-making, men were taught to believe that they could remake themselves, not through hard work and natural ability, but through appearance and consumption.[10] Discussing the influence of magazines and advertising on the traditional myth of self-making, Ronald Berman explains that

> *Vanity Fair* was (before the advent of the *New Yorker*) the main source for the creation of social identity through high style. It assumed that self-determination operates through consumption. One of its great themes is

> the acquisition of identity through conscious choice. That choice is exerted through transaction within the marketplace. The primary assumption of the marketplace of style is that we can choose what we want to be without inhibition. A secondary assumption is that diligent consumption, as thoughtful and perhaps as arduous as that of a lifetime of good works, legitimizes our efforts. (1994, 17)

Consumerism was the latest manifestation of the American myth of democracy: advertisers promised that regardless of class and background, anyone could purchase the image of wealth and success.

The growth of a consumer ethic transformed traditional assumptions about how a man achieved success. Writers like Benjamin Franklin, whose *Autobiography* (1790) and other writing helped create the success manual, an immensely popular and influential genre[11] which continues to enjoy popularity in American culture, believed that success was based on the "character ethic." As cultural historian Warren I. Susman explains, the character ethic

> proposed a method for both mastery and development of the self. In fact, it argued that its kind of self-control was the way to the fullest development of the moral significance of the self. But it also provided a method of presenting the self to society, offering a standard of conduct that assured interrelationship between the "social" and the "moral." (273)

According to cultural historians Joseph L. DeVitis and John Martin Rich, the character ethic established this connection between the social and the moral by stressing the importance of "citizenship, duty, democracy, work, outdoor life, conquest, honor, morals, manners, integrity, and manhood. Desirable character traits included perseverance, industry, frugality, sobriety, punctuality, reliability, thoroughness, and initiative" (11). Franklin's ideals had influenced the values and beliefs of generations of American men who sought to better themselves but by the early twentieth century, as business, advertising, and consumerism became more influential, the character ethic was increasingly perceived as ineffective and unrealistic.

Hard work and good moral character may have been the basis for success in an

earlier America, but "In an increasingly urban and bureaucratic society, when the presentation of self and effective interpersonal relationships became key ingredients to success, one could not hope to move ahead in business, consummate a good marriage, or run a decent home without certain commodities that enhanced one's appearance and personality" (Parrish 76). Men and women were told they could create the right image by buying the right clothes and by saying the right things, thus creating the right impression to be successful. According to DeVitis and Rich, the "personality ethic," like the character ethic, stressed the idea that success could be achieved through conscious choice, but rather than focusing on personal values, advocates of the personality ethic "focused on developing a charming presence and attractive physical appearance. They tended to show less concern for manners as an expression of morals and more concern for the impression that manners make on other people" (49). The replacement of Franklin's *Autobiography* by Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) as the defining American success manual marked, in historian Judy Hilkey's words, a "transition from a nineteenth-century focus on character to a twentieth-century emphasis on personality and the salesman ethic of a consumer society, where ability to persuade would become more important than the authentic self implicit in the concept of character" (127). As Warren I. Susman concludes, both the character and the personality ethic "relate to the needs of a particular social structure and do not develop in an atmosphere of pure philosophical speculation. The older vision no longer suited personal or social needs; the newer vision seemed particularly suited for the problems of the self in a changed social order, the developing mass consumer society" (280).

Jay Gatsby symbolizes the self-made man in an age defined by the growth of advertising and mass consumerism. Gatsby is the creation of a young, poor James Gatz of North Dakota and is, according to Nick, "just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent" (104). James Gatz--the son of "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people--his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (104)--dreams of better things, his conception of the successful individual influenced by a mix of success manuals, magazine biographies, and advertisements. Popular magazines like *McClure's* and *Cosmopolitan* were filled with the biographies of American

millionaires and "the major part of every biography was devoted to the Road to Success, and the heroic rise to prominence seemed to embody the ultimate meaning or at least the ultimate drama in life" (Greene 140). One can imagine a young James Gatz among the "Rural readers and city clerks [who] could thrill [...] to illustrated articles on 'Wall Street,' on 'Two Miles of Millionaires' (about Fifth Avenue), on 'Ball Giving in New York,' on 'The Equipage of the Millionaire,' and on 'The Palace Cottages of Newport'" in the pages of *Munsey's* (Greene 104).

Young James Gatz may not have the family background of wealth and social position which Tom Buchanan enjoys, but he has been convinced by these magazines and by the traditional American myth of the self-made man that social mobility, and the ability to reinvent himself, is possible if he works to create the right image. And it is Gatsby's combining of the character and personality ethics that defines Jay Gatsby as the symbol of a changing model of masculine success. Following the traditional model of self-making established by Benjamin Franklin and reinforced in countless success manuals and in the popular stories of Horatio Alger, young James Gatz works hard to improve his mind and manners, as evidenced by his "SCHEDULE" and "General Resolves" (181-2). But traditional self-improvement and a belief in the character ethic alone do not help Jay Gatsby create the impression of being "a man of fine breeding" (76), as Meyer Wolfshiem initially sees him. James Gatz can become Jay Gatsby because he is attractive--Daisy at one point remarks to Gatsby, "You always look so cool" and then states, "you resemble the advertising of the man [...]" (125)--and because he has learned the value of the personality ethic. Nick says of Gatsby, "if personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (6). James Gatz does not have money or social standing, but he has

> one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced--or seemed to face--the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at

your best, you hoped to convey. (52-3)

Possessing neither Tom's social position nor his intimidating, aggressive physical presence--Gatsby's body is never discussed by Nick until Gatsby ends up floating dead in his swimming pool, his corporeality symbolizing the destruction of his dream and his self-made image--Gatsby cannot bully people to get what he wants, so he has instead learned to "win friends and influence people," using his smile, appearance, and personality as the means to success.

Understanding wealth and social mobility as portrayed in advertising and popular culture, Gatsby believes that he can purchase an identity that will allow him to win Daisy and thus achieve his dream. Gatsby has managed to acquire enormous wealth, like Tom Buchanan, but coming from a poor background, Gatsby has very different assumptions about money, consumption, and social position. Roger Lewis argues that unlike Tom, who has traded aspirations for a fixed social position and whose "money was divested of dreams before he was even born,"

> Gatsby's [...] is new money, money in the process of being acquired. This gives the money some purpose and vitality; what Gatsby buys he buys for a purpose: to win Daisy. But there is a danger for Gatsby in this redeeming purposefulness. When he buys his fantastic house, he thinks he is buying a dream, not simply purchasing property. This direction makes Gatsby a more sympathetic man than Tom, but it is a sympathy he projects at the price of naivete; he is completely innocent of the limits of what money can do, a man who, we feel, would believe every word of an advertisement. (51)

Gatsby believes that if he purchases the right goods, he can create the right impression in the present and erase his personal history, thus allowing him to "repeat the past" (116). Advertisings present a world out of time and social context: appearance determines social position, so if Gatsby can create the correct image through the goods he purchases, he believes he can be part of that upper-class society. Gatsby himself becomes an advertisement, trying to catch Daisy's eye and sell Daisy on the fact that he now has the wealth and social position he believes he needs to win her.

Unfortunately, the impression which Gatsby creates reveals his wealth but also his misunderstanding about the difference between his new money and the old money of Tom Buchanan, a difference revealed neither in advertisings nor in the more traditional myth of the self-made man. In hopes of attracting Daisy's attention, Gatsby buys a house across the bay, "a colossal affair by any standard--it was a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side" (9). Ronald Berman suggests that Gatsby buys his particular house because he needs it to

> suggest "home," "family," "clan," "tradition," and, especially, "ancestors." Gatsby knows that the last phrase matters. Personal identity requires legitimation by history, something that he has thought about. He wants not wealth or interior decoration but that his identity be confirmed, turned into generations of biography. (1997, 180-1)

Gatsby may long to create the impression of ancestry, but what his house actually suggests is Gatsby's belief that identity can be established through consumption, and in this he reveals what Tom, and even Nick, would describe as a typical misperception of the *nouveaux riches*. Nick eventually decides that Gatsby's mansion is a "huge incoherent failure of a house" (188); like Gatsby, the house is "spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivory" (9), suggesting not family history but the need to create this impression through an item he can purchase.

Gatsby may be interested in creating a sense of family history, but he also believes that being in the company of many interesting people will make him part of "high society," another idea no doubt gleaned from magazines like *Vanity Fair*. Gatsby does not seem to enjoy the parties he gives, but he believes in the importance of creating the image of popularity and wealth by keeping his house "always full of interesting people, night and day. People who do interesting things. Celebrated people" (96). Nick tells us that "Gatsby's notoriety, spread about by hundreds who had accepted his hospitality and so become authorities upon his past, had increased all summer until he fell just short of being news." Nick is not sure "Just why these inventions were a source of satisfaction to James Gatz of North Dakota" (103-4), but we can guess that Gatsby wants to create an impression that he is important enough for Daisy to notice, and now rich enough to

compete with Tom. Gatsby drives a car that Tom describes as a "circus wagon" (128), and when Daisy does finally come to visit, Gatsby spends all his time worrying whether she is impressed with his possessions. He shows Daisy his huge assortment of shirts (97-8), believing that the beauty and cost of his possessions will help make up for his lack of family history and class stability.

And of course, this is Gatsby's tragic mistake: he believes that he can purchase an identity that will help him convince Daisy to leave Tom and marry him. As a self-made man who "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (104), Gatsby does not believe in the reality of history, and more importantly, he does not understand the realities of wealth and class difference, for he has been led to believe that class differences are determined by material possessions and good manners, and that these in can be attained through self-improvement and thoughtful consumption. As advertising historian Roland Marchaud explains, advertising taught the American public that

> The "society" of the wealthy [...] was an organized society. As revealed in advertisements, it had distinct boundaries and standards of admission. People who were "in society" could be confidently labeled as such; others could be described as seeking to "break in." For their own tactical purposes, advertisers simultaneously stressed both the clarity of such boundaries and the ease of crossing them--the first to enhance the exclusiveness and desirability of the life of the rich, and the second to suggest how easily the advertised product would eliminate barriers to upward mobility. (194-5)

Gatsby believes that a big house full of people, a big car and beautiful clothes will both give him passage into Daisy's upper-class society and show Daisy and others that he belongs there.

But to Tom, Gatsby is still "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (137), a gangster who believes quite naively that "money will help him buy back the girl, since money had taken her away from him" (Hoffman 110), and also believes that the purity of his dream will somehow justify the illegal means by which he has attained his money. What Gatsby fails to realize is that "the rich are different from you and me" and that, as Alberto Lena argues,

> in a world dominated by millionaires such as Buchanan, it becomes more and more difficult for men like Gatsby, whatever their mistakes and deficiencies, to climb the social ladder without partaking of the corruption that is associated with the leisure class. In the long run, it seems probable that Buchanan's class would dictate the rules of society to which Gatsby aspires, thus making it hard for such self-made men to escape its corrosive influence. (35-6)

Nick never states whether Gatsby recognizes the flaw inherent in his dream, or whether he dies believing that Tom alone kept Daisy from him, though Nick believes that Gatsby "must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream" (169). But Nick learns through Gatsby's life and death that beneath the enduring myth of the self-made man is the reality of class exclusion which makes Gatsby's dream of rising from poverty to wealth impossible without corrupting the purity of that dream. Seeing Gatsby as merely a gangster who sought to steal his wife, Tom feels no guilt about Gatsby's death, telling Nick "That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's" (187). Nick does not attempt to explain to Tom Gatsby's dreams, ideals, and aspirations, for he knows that Tom lacks the empathy and imagination to understand the dreams that underlie what Gatsby aspired to achieve.

While Nick blames Gatsby's death on Tom, he blames the tragic failure of Gatsby's aspirations on Daisy, whom he perceives as shallow and unworthy of Gatsby's grand dream. Recounting his first meeting with Daisy in New York, Nick describes what he believes is Daisy's "basic insincerity" which arises from "her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged" (22). He explains that "there was an excitement in her voice that men who cared for her found hard to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered 'Listen,' a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay exciting things hovering in the next hour" (14). Daisy's voice is like an advertisement, tapping the listener's imagination and promising more than can be delivered. In Nick's judgment, Gatsby was seduced by Daisy's voice, by the beauty and social position it promises. Nick does admit that "when Daisy tumbled short of his [Gatsby's] dreams" it was "not through her own fault but because of the

colossal vitality of his illusion" (101), yet he portrays Daisy as lacking the depth of emotion and character to merit Gatsby's dream. As Nick sees it, Gatsby has remade himself for Daisy, but Daisy is "offended" by what underlies Gatsby's West Egg world

> because it wasn't a gesture but an emotion. She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented "place" that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village--appalled by its raw vigor that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a short cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand. (113-4)

Nick portrays Daisy as a woman without emotion, someone who feels more comfortable with Tom's shallow, brutish masculinity than with the genuine emotion and affection Gatsby offers. Nick suggests that when things get complicated, as they do after Myrtle Wilson's death, Daisy chooses the safety of wealth and social position over the complexities of love.

But Nick's judgment of Daisy is unfair, for Nick focuses his narrative on making Gatsby a symbol of the self-made man whose grand dreams are destroyed by the idle rich, a tragic hero with a complexity of desires and motives Nick refuses to see in Daisy or Tom. As Sarah Beebe Fryer argues, "although Nick conscientiously relates what Daisy does, he clearly does not understand what motivates her" (154). Nick portrays Gatsby as the victim of Daisy's indifference, but we learn that Daisy represents for Gatsby not simply a woman to love, but the inspiration and justification of his desire to transcend his social position and remake himself through the accumulation of wealth. Daisy symbolizes "the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves:" she is a prize "gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (157), and a chance for Gatsby to come in contact with the wealthy without "indiscernible barbed wire between" (155). Nick may see Gatsby's dream as pure, but Gatsby's attraction to Daisy seems less about love than the desire to compete with other men who are above Gatsby in wealth and class, and that is why Gatsby is "excited" by the fact "that many men had already loved Daisy--it increased her value in his eyes" (156). Winning Daisy means winning her away from other men, including her husband Tom Buchanan, and this enhances her value for Gatsby.[12] It is

not enough for Gatsby that Daisy leave Tom; he demands that she admit she never loved Tom (138-9), an attempt to restore his belief in their true love for one another, but also a means of humiliating Tom. Nick does not admit Gatsby's competitiveness, for this would tarnish Nick's image of Gatsby as an idealist and victim of Tom's aggressive masculinity; Gatsby would be revealed as not completely the opposite of Tom, which would undermine the symbolic meaning Nick gives to Gatsby's life and death.

Daisy is another commodity which Gatsby wishes to purchase as part of his process of self-making, yet he purchases her fraudulently for he does not have the social currency she and her family require to ensure an acceptable marriage. Given his financial and social shortcomings, Gatsby consciously chooses to misrepresent himself to Daisy. Jay Gatsby may be the manifestation of James Gatz's dreams and desire for self-making, but he is also the means by which Gatsby seduces Daisy.[13] As Nick admits, Gatsby

> had certainly taken her under false pretenses. I do not mean that he had traded on his phantom millions, but he had deliberately given Daisy a false sense of security; he let her believe that he was a person from much the same strata as herself--that he was fully able to take care of her. As a matter of fact he had no such facilities. (156)

Gatsby may believe he lives outside of society and history, but Daisy exists in a world with very specific social rules and expectations. Daisy's economic future relies on marriage, not on success in the world, or underworld, of business: her options are more limited than those of Nick and Gatsby, and her future is not self-determined, but decided upon by her family and class expectations.

Daisy resists "the pressure of the world outside," waiting for Gatsby, wanting "to see him and feel his presence beside her and be reassured that she was doing the right thing after all" (158), but she can only wait so long. Unlike Gatsby, who consciously creates an identity which he slowly but steadily works to inhabit, Daisy feels "something within her [...] crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately--and the decision must be made by some force--of love, of money, of some unquestionable practicality--that was close at hand" (159). Nick criticizes Daisy for being unworthy of Gatsby's dream, but Nick fails to see that Daisy too had expectations and needs which

Gatsby dishonestly suggested he could fulfill. Daisy is unhappy with Tom, but one has to wonder whether she would be any happier with Gatsby. Has Gatsby continued to pursue her out of love, or does she simply represent the final step in his dream of self-making, the last part of a past he wishes to recapture? Does he pursue Daisy because "he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that went into loving her" (117), as Nick would have us believe or, as Ross Posnock believes, is Gatsby's "obsession with Daisy, his commitment 'to the following of a grail,' [...] founded on her mediated value, a value splendidly confirmed by her marriage to a multimillionaire" (207)? Finally, we can only guess at Daisy's motives and desires because Daisy has no voice; neither Gatsby nor Tom nor Nick hear her words. Gatsby hears only a "voice [...] full of money" (127) because Daisy symbolizes his material and social aspirations; Tom only shows her affection when she threatens to leave him for Gatsby, and thus threatens his dominance over her and Gatsby, a dominance through which he defines his manhood; and Nick hears only her "basic insincerity" because he blames Daisy for Gatsby's tragic disillusionment.

Constructing Gatsby's Greatness

Nick came to New York in the spirit of adventure, lured by a wish to escape the security of the Midwest and embrace the exciting, seemingly uncharted world of big business. But through his experiences with Gatsby and Daisy and Tom and Jordan, Nick comes to recognize that New York too is like an advertisement, promising excitement and wealth while denying the reality of exploitation and disillusionment.[14] As Richard Lehan explains,

> For all the excitement that Nick feels as he walks the street of New York trying to unlock the secrets and the mystery of the city, he comes to understand that such a world feeds on the labor and energy of others--like the Wilsons, that the city is both lure and prey, and that the lonely clerks walking the empty evening streets are all young romantics in the process of having their dreams drained. (106-7)

Honest hard work and determination, cornerstones of the myth of self-making, are not rewarded in the big city, for those in power, men like Tom Buchanan, define the world of business through their competitive masculinity and unscrupulously defend their position

against those who would aspire to compete with them. Having recognized the corruption underlying the success he desires, Nick no longer sees New York as promising "all the mystery and the beauty of the world" (73), but

> as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once grotesque and conventional, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a house--the wrong house. But no one knows the woman's name, and no one cares. (185)

Angered and confused by Gatsby's death and by the cruel coldness of the East, Nick no longer wants the adventure and excitement promised by New York, but instead longs for the Midwest, where he has family and a community who share his middle-class ideals and give him a comforting sense of identity.

No longer restless with the limits of his hometown, Nick returns to find a place with order and tradition, a place where he knew wonder and innocence. As Kermit W. Moyer explains, "Nick's nostalgia is not for any factual Midwest, but for the pre-war world of his childhood--a world as yet untouched by the moral anarchy and inarticulate panic Nick finds in the dead end of the East" (225-6). Nostalgically recounting his adolescent memories of home, Nick finds solace in the Midwest, for he knows that "I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through the decades by a family's name" (184). Unlike Gatsby, Nick has a past and a family that gives him a comforting sense of identity. While Nick may have found an initial excitement at being "a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler"(8) in New York, he does not finally share Gatsby's belief "in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us" (189), for he recognizes that the dream of freedom and unlimited opportunity that lead sailors to America has been corrupted by the aggressive, exploitative masculinity of men like Tom Buchanan, men who lack dreams and higher ideals to define their actions. Nick is the Dutch sailor who comes to recognize through the failure of another explorer,

Gatsby, that "the fresh, green breast of the new world" (189) will become "a valley of ashes" (27), and that it is better to return to the old world, thus trading grand dreams for the security of family, a fixed social position, and the sense of identity that arises from them. But while Nick returns to the Midwest and to his middle-class values for security, his dreams and ideals do remain alive in his nostalgically mythologizing the character of Jay Gatsby.

Nick explains how at Gatsby's funeral he "tried to think about Gatsby then for a moment but he was already too far away" (183), and how "after Gatsby's death the East was [...] distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction" (185). But as in the case of his relationship with Jordan, Nick feels it is his responsibility to make sense of his relationship with Gatsby, "to leave things in order and not just trust that obliging and indifferent sea to sweep my refuse away" (185). And after two years back home in the security and stability of the Midwest, Nick believes he finally has the perspective to make sense of his experiences in New York and to tell Gatsby's story and finally dispel the "grotesque, circumstantial, eager and untrue" (171) rumours that surrounded Gatsby's life and death. Like Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a novel which strongly influenced *The Great Gatsby*, Nick becomes the caretaker of Gatsby's memory: "I found myself on Gatsby's side and alone [and] it grew upon me that I was responsible, because no one else was interested--interested, I mean, with that intense personal interest to which everyone has some vague right at the end" (172). Nick explains that "When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged insights into the human heart," yet Nick continues to feel a sense of interest and responsibility for Gatsby: "Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction" (6). This sense of responsibility motivates Nick to tell Gatsby's story: Nick may have been right when he told Gatsby, "You can't repeat the past" (116), but what Nick believes he can do as a narrator/writer is provide a glimpse into Gatsby's history. Nick explains that Gatsby "talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy" (117), and it is the pure motive behind the corrupt method that Nick wishes to portray.

Nick admits the attractiveness of Gatsby's personality and marvels at the enormity of his wealth and possessions, but what finally convince Nick of Gatsby's "greatness" are the true character, determination, and belief in the myth of the self-made man which helped James Gatz bring to life the fictional character of Jay Gatsby. Nick states at the beginning of his narrative that "Gatsby [...] represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (6), making clear that he disapproves of Gatsby's image and how he made his money. Nick sees the identity Gatsby creates as a pastiche of advertising images and adventure story stereotypes, "the very phrases" Gatsby uses to describe his fictional past having been "worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned 'character' leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne" (70). But at the same time, Nick admires Gatsby's desire to remake himself, seeing in Gatsby "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again" (6). Disillusioned with the reality of New York and the world of business, and disgusted with aggressive masculinity of Tom Buchanan which has destroyed Nick's and Gatsby's dreams of success, Nick celebrates the dreams and ideals which he believes motivated Gatsby and make him great.

Nick knows the truth behind Gatsby's wealth, which was created through the "gonnections" of Meyer Wolfshiem and the New York underworld, but in his narrative, Nick suppresses this information, choosing instead to emphasize Gatsby's individual initiative and thus to define Gatsby in terms of the seemingly outmoded myth of the self-made man. What Nick values in Gatsby, and what he focuses on in telling Gatsby's story, is Gatsby's belief in the old dream of self-making that was corrupted by social and historical forces that Gatsby had been convinced did not apply to him. Though he is critical of the fictional identity Gatsby has created, Nick

> marvels at the real changes in Gatsby's life and knows that the qualities they displayed were substantial. Gatsby's real life has been at least as adventurous as the fiction he has relied on to invent his "unreal" life. And it has called for a kind of sophistication that newsstand models of identity

(which have become our models of identity) fail completely to understand.

(Berman 1997, 134-5)

Gatsby was always concerned with creating the right impression through his image and possessions, but what Nick finally values in Gatsby, and what he sees lacking in Tom, is "his capacity for wonder" which allowed Gatsby to come so close to his dream. Nick allows Gatsby to symbolize both the destruction of the American dream of self-making and the heroic, but finally tragic, attempt to achieve that dream.

Nick's narrative is thus a portrayal of Gatsby's life and death that Nick hopes will not only affirm Gatsby's "greatness," but also satisfy Nick's need to believe in the value of traditional masculine individualism. Meyer Wolfshiem suggests to Nick, "Let us learn how to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead" (180), but while Gatsby is alive Nick only pays him one compliment--"'They're [Tom and Daisy] a rotten crowd,' I shouted, across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together'"--because as Nick repeatedly claims, "I disapproved of him from beginning to end" (162). It is only after Gatsby's death, and after his own return to the Midwest, that Nick begins to construct "the Great Gatsby," Gatsby's true greatness, the meaning of his heroic life and tragic death becoming a thesis which Nick desires to prove through his narrative. Despite Gatsby's criminal activity, Nick claims at the beginning of his narrative that "Gatsby turned out all right in the end--it was what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (6-7), and thus Gatsby's story is also the story of what Nick feels he has learned about class, wealth, masculine ideals, and the myths which permeate American culture. Nick's narrative is a tribute to Gatsby--it tells of Gatsby's illusions and ideals, his desires and dreams, and the nostalgia of the last four paragraphs make Gatsby's tragedy the tragedy of America itself-- but it also reveals Nick's need for a hero who possesses imagination and grand dreams and embodies the ideal of heroic masculine individualism at the moment in history when that mythic ideal of the self-made man was being destroyed by social and economic realities of early twentieth-century America.

Notes

1. Discussing Arthur Mizener's *The Far Side of Paradise* (1951), "the first major study of Fitzgerald's work," John B. Chambers suggests that "it should be remembered that Mizener was writing in the late 1940s when Fitzgerald's reputation was not high. His major task was to rescue Fitzgerald from the clearly expressed public disapproval which had been growing in the later years, at least since the publication of his various confessional essays" (2).

2. Describing Fitzgerald's complex relationship to the decade he helped define, Brian Way argues that

> once Fitzgerald ceased to be partial creator and semi-official spokesman of the Jazz Age, his relation to it became much more complex. There is certainly no simple equivalence between his career and the history of the time--any more than there is between his life and his fiction. It is true that he made money, drank too much and showed in his own behavior much of the violence and nervous instability that had become a kind of national neurosis by the end of the decade. On the other hand, he developed powers of self-analysis and detachment, qualities of moral discrimination most uncharacteristic of the people he generally associated with. Most uncharacteristically, he was, by 1924, beginning to measure the significance of his life chiefly by the extent to which he could devote himself to disinterested artistic creation. (11-12)

3. Walter Lippmann saw this mix of nostalgia and faith in progress in President Woodrow Wilson, about whom Lippmann wrote in 1914, "he knows that there is a new world demanding new methods, but he dreams of an older world. He is torn between the two. It is a very deep conflict in him between what he knows and what he feels" (qtd. in Levine 50). See Levine's essay for a discussion of the mix of "progress and nostalgia" which he, like Nash, argues defines the twenties in America.

4. Trachtenberg argues that "Turner's frontier [...] is as much an invention of cultural belief as a genuine historical fact." For example, to create the myth of the frontier as a place of freedom and infinite possibility, and thus a world apart from the politics and

bureaucracy of the East, Turner "ignores and obscures the real politics of the West, where, as Howard Lamar has shown, federal territorial policy held much of the region in a dependent, colonial status (prior to the admission to statehood) through most of the post-Civil War period" (17).

5. Owen Wister, Frederic Remington, and Theodore Roosevelt all suffered from "neurasthenia," a nervous disorder which Dr. S. Weir Mitchell believed could only be cured by escaping the feminizing influence of eastern society. Following Mitchell's advice, "in the last two decades of the century, large numbers of weak and puny eastern city men [...] all came west to find a cure for their insufficient manhood" (Kimmel 1996, 135).

6. The connection between business and religious faith is most clearly displayed in the work of Bruce Barton, an advertising and marketing executive who in his popular writing "attempt[ed] to reshape traditional Protestant morality to the dictates of a consumer society" (Parrish 78). In *A Young Man's Jesus* (1914) and the very popular *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925), Barton portrayed Jesus as a successful businessman who combined charisma and intelligent marketing to become the most successful salesman in history.

7. For a discussion of the changing middle-class perception of the city and of "the paradoxes of Vanity Fair, its spectacles of mystery in street and park, in home and store, in regions fragmented and set against each other" (139), see Trachtenberg's chapter, "The Mysteries of the Great City."

8. Fitzgerald had first-hand knowledge of the advertising industry, for "After applying unsuccessfully for newspaper work, he took a job with the Barron Collier advertising agency" (Bruccoli 1981, 96) in the spring of 1919. Fitzgerald only held the job for three months, but Ann Douglas argues that Fitzgerald nevertheless learned the value and influence of advertising, a knowledge he applied to promoting himself and his books: discussing Fitzgerald's 1923 essay "How I Would Sell My Book," Douglas concludes that "Brash but incandescent self-promotion was one of the motive springs of the young Fitzgerald's art. 'I am a fake,' he liked to explain in a half-conscious homage to the values of Madison Avenue, 'but I am not a lie'" (65).

9. Roland Marchaud argues that

> ad creators tried to reflect public aspirations rather than contemporary circumstances, to mirror popular fantasies rather than social realities. Advertisers recognized that consumers would rather identify with scenes of higher status than ponder reflections of their actual lives. In response, they often sought to give products a 'class image' by placing them in what recent advertising jargon would call 'upscale' settings. (xvii)

10. Trachtenberg argues that combining the power of advertising and the values of consumerism, "the department store stood as a prime urban artifact of the age, a place of learning as well as buying: a pedagogy of modernity" (131). Also, see Ewen for a discussion of how mass images were used to educate Americans, and especially immigrants, in the importance of consumption as a means of establishing identity and participating in the American dream.

11. Judy Hilkey provides a detailed discussion of the nature and influence of success manuals in late nineteenth-century, and also discusses how economic transformations resulted in changes in the nature of success manuals.

12. Ross Posnock argues that

> By splicing together Gatsby's initiations into sex and commodity fetishism, Fitzgerald brilliantly dramatizes how social existence (Gatsby's capitalist orientation) determines consciousness (he expresses his sexual desire by projecting it into things). Both desire and commodity fetishism, Fitzgerald implies, are governed by displacement and mediation and are inherently insatiable, perpetually deferring immediate gratification. In erecting other men's desires as his standard of value, and negating the reality of his own impulses, Gatsby entraps himself in an endless pattern of imitation. This self-negation is the source of his conspicuous reliance on mediators--models of behavior--throughout his life. (206-7)

As I have suggested earlier, Gatsby creates his own identity and his understanding of wealth and social status from advertisements, and they also influence his perception of Daisy not as a woman with desires and needs who lives in a real emotional, social and economic context, but as a symbol of Gatsby's aspirations and a confirmation of his

achieving the identity he has created.

13. Alan Trachtenberg argues that the

> advertisement is unique among artworks in that its cardinal premise is falsehood, deceit, its purpose being to conceal the connection between labor and its product in order to persuade consumers to purchase *this* brand. The advertisement suggests the fictive powers of that product, its ability to stand for what it is not. In the advertisement, the good performs its work imaginatively, symbolically, and its character as a commodity is manifest in the fictive drama precisely to the degree that it is suppressed and negated. (138)

Gatsby and Daisy's relationship seems to be based on falsehood, but contrary to Nick's judgment, Gatsby makes a far greater effort to suppress and negate the labour that has gone into the image he has created. Daisy does not misrepresent herself consciously; in fact, Gatsby seems more responsible than she for her "ability to stand for what [she] is not."

14. Fitzgerald's most explicit treatment in the novel of the negative influence of advertising appears in the form of the billboard for "the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg" which "brood on over the solemn dumping ground" (27-8), the wasteland where George and Myrtle live. One can link this advertisement to Gatsby's death: believing Gatsby killed his wife, George begins to believe Dr. Eckleburg's eyes are the eyes of God, despite Michaelis' assurance that "'That's an advertisement'" (167). Laura Barrett suggests that "The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg imply that God has been replaced by mass marketing, and Fitzgerald's book provides many examples of the [...] omnipresence of advertisements in the 1920s" (541). There is a definite irony in the fact that the combination of the billboard advertisement and Tom's misinformation motivate George to destroy Gatsby, who has also been the victim of an illusion created by advertising and wealth.

CHAPTER THREE: Escaping the Gray Flannel Suit: "Containment Culture" and the Excitement of Otherness in *On the Road*

The fifties are usually described as a conservative decade which emphasized a mix of responsibility, religion, family and consumerism, but the fifties also had its share of rebels, the most popular of whom was Jack Kerouac, "the king of the Beats." Like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Kerouac gained popularity in a post-war environment in which a small segment of the population, usually young and disillusioned with middle-class culture, rebelled against the norms and values of their parents. But while Fitzgerald wrote about the experiences of the wealthy upper-class, and about those who aspired to that wealth and class, Kerouac and other Beat writers sought and wrote about experiences outside, and considered below, those of middle-class society, challenging its focus on corporate hierarchy and material consumption. As Gregory Stephenson explains,

> In their writings the Beats share a sense that the crisis of Western civilization--as evinced by the appalling slaughter and devastation of the world wars, by the breakdown of values, the decay of ideas, and by the spiritual sterility of the modern world--is rooted in our society's misguided faith in rationality and materialism, in the analytical faculties of the mind, in the narrow dogmatism of logical positivism and scientism, and in the identification with the conscious self, the ego. To redeem and revitalize the life of our culture and our individual lives, the Beats propose the cultivation of the energies of the body and the instincts, of the unconscious and the spirit. (8)

Desiring adventure and the spiritual renewal they believed it provided, the Beats turned their backs on the material pursuits and mainstream values of middle-class culture and searched for a new literary style and language to communicate their experiences and beliefs.

Jack Kerouac was the most recognized and discussed Beat writer, his novel *On the Road* coming to represent the rebelliousness of the Beat generation. Bob Dylan said of Kerouac's novel, "I read *On the Road* in maybe 1959. It changed my life like it changed everyone else's" (qtd. in Turner viii; my italics). Historian James T. Patterson argues that

"*On the Road* was a sacred text of sorts not only for the handful of self-proclaimed Beats, but also for many others, most of them younger than Kerouac, who responded to the message of escape from convention extolled in the book" (410). This message has continued to attract readers to the novel--Bruce Cook describes "*On the Road* [as] one of the favorite books of the so-called X-Generation" (247)[1]--and has helped make Kerouac a popular icon whose life is written about more than his writing. As fellow Beat writer John Clellon Holmes explains, "Kerouac died in 1969 of complications from alcoholism. The mythology that arose around his life and work have [sic] created a fierce commercialism, spawning movies, clothing, books, even the possibilities of a U.S. postal stamp" (16-7). Kerouac's work remains in print, and a new edition of *On the Road* was published in 1997 to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of its original publication. Writing about the popularity of this novel, one has to ask: How new and innovative was *On the Road*? What conservative literary traditions and social values did Kerouac challenge and which others did he reproduce? Is it finally this mix of the rebellious and the traditional which accounts for the initial and continuing interest in *On the Road*?

Although *On the Road* is commonly perceived as the novel that defined a new style of writing and challenged the conservative values of the fifties, I will argue that *On the Road* is a novel that also reinforces literary and social conventions. *On the Road* remains Kerouac's most popular novel because it combines stylistic innovations--a seemingly spontaneous style and language--with what critics have defined as a traditional motif of American literature: the quest to find a world of innocence and freedom away from the corrupting influence of society. As Gregory Stephenson argues, *On the Road* reproduces "the peculiarly American tendency to view civilization as insipid, squalid and corrupt and to seek a refuge and a new beginning on the frontier" (23) and, according to Ihab Hassan, "its hero stands at the end of the line of American 'innocents' who consume their vision in rebellion and are themselves consummated in affliction' (94). Fitting *On the Road* into this American literary tradition, Scott Donaldson argues that "Sal Paradise hits the road with the same dream of the unpatterned, unconfining life that tramped the forest with Natty Bumppo, sailed with Ismael, and floated down the river with Huck Finn" (x).

This American tradition of rebelliousness is apparent in Kerouac's criticism of

mainstream social norms, which I will argue focuses on challenging the traditional role of men as responsible breadwinners who are expected to embrace corporate life, suburban housing, and summer vacations. Rather than accepting a life in a "gray flannel suit," Kerouac offers a model of masculinity which looks back to an older, freer America: the ideal, represented by Dean Moriarty, of the man who searches for freedom and self-reliance on the open frontier. John Clellon Holmes argues that Kerouac writes of an America "full of anxious faces in which his eye has spied an older, more rooted America (of spittoons, and guffawing, and winter suppers), now vanishing bewilderingly behind the billboards and TV antennas; an America whose youths stand around on the street corners, undecided, caught in the discrepancy between the wild longings they feel and the tame life they get" (134). *On the Road* portrays a nostalgic searching for an America, and an American masculinity, which has disappeared from the suburbs of the east but, as hopes Kerouac's narrator Sal Paradise, can still be found by hitting the road and heading west.

The Fifties: Containment and Consensus?

In "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster" (1957), Norman Mailer identified a new anti-hero in American culture, the rebellious "psychopath" who "had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro" (341). Mailer argued that this character arose as a reaction to the horrors of World War II, to the "psychic havoc" that "the concentration camps and the atom bomb" inflicted "upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years," and to the fear that one could suffer "a death which could not follow with dignity as a possible consequence to serious actions we have chosen, but rather a death by deus ex machine in a gas chamber or a radioactive city" (338). In the face of this doom, the hipster found meaning in violence and physical and sexual sensation, living his life "as a search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it" (347).

But while a small group of such hipsters lived on the fringes of fifties society, the more common reaction to the Cold War which followed World War II was a conservative focus on family and security. The fifties have often been described by historians as experiencing a "containment culture," which cultural historian Alan Nadel describes as

resulting from

> the general acceptance during the cold war of a relatively small set of narratives by a relatively large portion of the population. It was a period, as many prominent studies indicated, when "conformity" became a positive value in and of itself. The virtue of conformity--to some idea of religion, to "middle-class" values, to distinct gender roles and rigid courtship rituals--became a form of public knowledge through the pervasive performances of and allusions to containment narratives. (1995, 4)

Offering a different interpretation of Cold War consensus, historian Douglas T. Miller suggests that this movement toward conservativism and conformity was the mainstream reaction to the same anxieties that Mailer described as shaping the psychology and behaviour of the hipster:

> The high marriage and birth rates mirrored America's sense of prosperity and purpose, but in perhaps deeper ways the great family emphasis was symptomatic of a nostalgic longing to the return to the old verities. Postwar adults, after all, had lived through the depression and World War II and were now trying to cope in the world of the Cold War, the nuclear arms race, and the Communist threat. If for millions the troublesome larger world seemed beyond their control, they could at least find a degree of stability in home and family. The postwar economic affluence gave millions the money to try to fulfill their nostalgic vision: the happy suburban family, huddling together, shielding one another from the terrors of modern times. (94)

Whether due to a hegemonic directing and limiting of ideological options by the U.S. government, film, and television, as Nadel suggests, or to a psychological response to the nuclear threat, as Miller argues, middle-class fifties America was a place largely defined by growing suburbs, consumerism, and ideological consensus.

The Hipsters and Beats were not the only ones to question the growing emphasis on marriage, consumption, and suburbanization. Sociologists like C. Wright Mills and David Riesman criticized the conformity of fifties American society, mourning the loss of

autonomy and individuality. In his influential and often-cited[2] book *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Riesman argued that the nature of social conformity had changed, for while earlier generations of Americans were "inner-directed," their conformity "mainly assured by their internalization of adult authority,"

> the middle-class urban American of today, the "outer-directed," is, by contrast, in a characterological sense more the product of his peers [...]. In adult life he continues to respond to these peers, not only with overt conformity, as do people in all times and places, but also in a deeper sense, in the very quality of his feeling. Yet, paradoxically, he remains a lonely member of the crowd because he never comes really close to the others or to himself. (v)

Riesman believed that autonomy had become increasing difficult because of the internalization of normative behaviour as defined by one's peers. As a traditional liberal, Riesman believed in the connection between democracy and individual liberty, and feared that "other-direction" would have dangerous consequences for both the individual and for democracy. As Kerouac's narrator Sal Paradise succinctly states, "This is the story of America. Everybody's doing what they think they're supposed to do" (68).

This fear that autonomy was being eroded by fifties conformity was particularly strong in regard to perceptions that traditional masculinity was being stripped away by bureaucracy and the necessity of being a responsible citizen and a provider for one's wife and children. Steven Cohan explains that as mainstream culture increasingly equated "normative masculinity with white-collar labor," the "corporate setting ended up relocating masculinity in what had previously been considered a 'feminine' sphere, primarily by valuing a man's domesticity (and consumption) over his work (and production) as the means through which he fulfilled societal expectations of what it took to be 'manly'" (xii). Questioning this changing definition of masculinity, William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) and Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) seemed to strike a nerve with middle-class men. Whyte and Wilson articulated the fear that middle-class men were giving up their freedom to pursue the material and financial goals which had become the fifties version of the American Dream, and both of

their books became immediate best-sellers. In his expansive cultural history, *The Fifties*, historian David Halberstam writes of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*,

> the book was published just as a major intellectual debate was forming on the issue of conformity in American life, particularly as the modern corporation became even bigger and became an increasingly important force in American life. The debate seemed to focus on the question of whether, despite the significant and dramatic increase in the standard of living for many Americans, the new white-collar life was turning into something of a trap and whether the great material benefits it promised and delivered were being exchanged for freedom and individuality. (526-7)

Sloan Wilson's main character, Tom Rath, is frustrated by the small place he has in a huge corporation controlled by men he does not respect, but whom he must please to move up the corporate ladder, a situation in direct contrast to the authority and direct action he experienced as a commanding officer during World War II. Tom and his wife Betsy try to pretend they are not interested in material and financial gain, and are happy with what they have, but Tom knows this is not true: "We might as well admit that what we want is a big house and a new car and trips to Florida in the winter, and plenty of life insurance. When you come right down to it, a man with three children has no damn right to say that money doesn't matter" (15). Tom finds a way out of the trap with the help of a sympathetic boss, but Tom never challenges the bureaucratic structure he feels is warping his values, undermining his freedom, and threatening how he defines himself as a man.

Reacting to this growing emphasis on consumption and materialism, the largely middle-class young men and women who would become known as Beats chose to simply drop out of the rat race and look for a life outside the suburbs. Halberstam says of the Beats,

> If other young people of their generation gloried in getting married, having children, owning property and cars, and socializing with their neighbors much like themselves, these young men and women saw suburbia as a prison. They wanted no such future of guaranteed pensions but instead sought freedom--freedom to pick up and go across the country at a

> moment's notice, if they so chose. They saw themselves as poets in a land of philistines, men seeking spiritual destinies rather than material ones. (295)

Not consciously political, the Beats were searching for a means of escaping, rather than actively challenging, the system.[3] Explaining how the Beats differed from the psychopathic, violent Hipster, Norman Mailer suggests that "the beatnik contemplates eternity, finds it beautiful, likes to believe it is waiting to receive him. He wants to get out of reality more than he wants to change it" (374). In a 1958 letter to Hollywood producer Jerry Wald, written when Kerouac was negotiating for a movie version of *On the Road*, Kerouac explained that "my only stress, is, again, *On the Road* was a sad and tender book, the critics only noticed the freneticism and overlooked the mild Huckleberry Finn spinebone of the story, and thats [sic] all I want to make sure about: that the picture will not be a violent [sic], or a picture about violence, roughnecks, hoodlumism, but a picture about goodhearted kids in pain of soul doing wild things out of desperation" (Brinkley 60; my italics).

This need to cure the "pain of soul" caused by a society focused on material gain is apparent throughout *On the Road*, the title suggesting the wish for physical escape as well as the desire to search for a higher consciousness. In a 1949 notebook entry regarding *On the Road*, Kerouac wrote:

> In 1848 certain wagon trains were bound for the West: men with their families & belongings & tools, going out to find their great and arduous inheritance in the magnificent territories. What could have been better for a man! But the moment they heard about the gold at Sutter's mill, some men unhitched their horses from the loaden, ramshackle, homey wagons, left their families behind, and took off on horseback, sweating for gold. All the gravity and glee and wonder of their lives and their loves was forgotten, for mere gold ...
>
> This is still what is going on in America. They've unhitched the horses from the wagons--from their souls and gone off like whores for a little gold. (Brinkley 54)

While Kerouac criticized rushing across the country for material gain, he did believe in questing for life experience and for personal and spiritual growth. John Clellon Holmes explains that although the Beats "rushed back and forth across the country on the slightest pretext, gathering kicks along the way, their real journey was inward; and if they seemed to trespass most boundaries, legal and moral, it was only in the hope of finding a belief on the other side" (1967, 369). During a brief stop at the continental divide, Sal Paradise describes how "we fumed in our mountain nook, mad drunken Americans in the mighty land. We were on the roof of America and all we could do was yell, I guess--across the night, eastward over the Plains, where somewhere an old man with white hair was probably walking toward us with the word, and would arrive at any moment and make us silent" (55). Though never articulating a clear spiritual system of belief, *On the Road* is filled with a sense of searching for something which cannot be bought and cannot be found in the comforts of suburban, middle-class America.

"The Only Rebellion Around"?

Jack Kerouac spent years unsuccessfully trying to get *On the Road* published, and yet when it finally was in print, it caused a sensation which made both Kerouac and his novel a popular, though not always a critical, success. The novel remains, along with Allan Ginsberg's poem *Howl*, the piece of literature most identified with the Beats, and Kerouac and *On the Road* have continued to enjoy an almost mythic status and cult-like popularity. Given this initial and continuing reaction, one has to ask, as Warren French does, Why has *On the Road* "become and remained so much more popular than any other of Kerouac's works, and what does its popularity suggest about the sensibilities of its audience?" (34) The common response to this question is that

> for thousands of middle-class youth, [*On the*] *Road* became the book that most articulated their discontent with the stifling atmosphere of the time. The novel's tumultuous, uninhibited adventure had a liberating impact on those who felt trapped by parental expectations, conformity, materialism, puritanical notions that sex and emotions were somehow shameful. Clearly here was an alternative voice. (Miller 108)

Yet, despite this popular perception of the novel, many critics have read *On the Road* as traditional in both theme and structure. French describes it as a "traditional cautionary tale, warning readers about the sorry nature of the world" (43) and Tim Hunt argues that "in spite of its reputation, *On the Road* is best understood as a skillfully managed traditional novel" (1).

Paul Goodman, gay anarchist and revolutionary who attacked mainstream American society,[4] "the organized system," in his book *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), reviewed the novel shortly after its publication and also wondered what was so revolutionary about the novel and the Beats it portrays:

> One is stunned at how conventional and law fearing these lonely middle-class fellows are. They dutifully get marriages and divorces. The hint of "gangbang" makes them impotent. They never masturbate or perform homosexual acts. They do not dodge the draft. They are hygienic about drugs and diet. They do not resent being underpaid, nor speak up at all. (280-1)

Goodman goes on to criticize Kerouac and the Beats for their lack of political commitment, which he argues was reflected in their desire to "drop out":

> They have the theory that to be affectless, not to care, is the ultimate rebellion; but this is a fantasy; for right under the surface, obvious to the trained eye, is a burning shame, hurt feelings, fear of impotence, speech and powerless tantrum, cowering before papa, being rebuffed by mama; and it is these anxieties that dictate their behavior in every crisis. (281)

Although Goodman's standards for rebellion may be more in line with those of the late-sixties--*Growing Up Absurd* "became something of a manifesto of the sixties New Left and counterculture" (Miller 142)--and a certain amount of censorship no doubt took place in order to have *On the Road* published,[5] Goodman perceptively identified the seeming disparity between the contents of the novel and the mythic status it continues to enjoy. As Warren French suggests "*On the Road* is surely a novel that has been more enthusiastically than carefully read" (44).

Though Goodman may be correct in identifying what he feels is the conservative

nature of *On the Road*, we must remember that rebelliousness is a relative concept, and that for the largely middle-class audience which embraced the novel in the late fifties, the world of drugs, sex, and cultural and racial Otherness described in the novel was something very new. During a time when many suburbs excluded non-whites, and African Americans were largely invisible to middle-class Americans, Kerouac portrayed a world outside the sterile suburbs his readers hoped to escape. Douglas T. Miller explains how the Beats, "outcasts by choice, [...] romanticized those whom they regarded as even more estranged from middle-class life than themselves--hobos, homosexuals, criminals, drug users, Mexicans, Indians, and particularly blacks" (107). I will argue that this romanticizing of Otherness is in part responsible for the interest in *On the Road* by middle-class youth in the fifties. Kerouac portray a rebellion against post-war, middle-class society, but it is a rebellion enacted by those who have the social and economic ability to choose to rebel and leave the comforts of their middle-class existence. Sal's desire to escape middle-class values and expectations, as well as his idealization of Dean, rely on the symbolic representation of African Americans, Mexicans, and the poor as Other, as enjoying a happier, more exciting lifestyle which Sal, as a middle-class male, can visit but does not have to remain a part of. And while these stereotypes play an important part in creating the novel's excitement and popularity, I will argue that unlike the many readers who seem unaware of or unconcerned with these stereotypes, Kerouac was in fact aware of the problematic nature of his idealization and symbolic use of the Other--whether defined by gender, race or class--through which Sal escapes the responsibilities, without ever giving up the privileges, of white, middle-class masculinity.

Love, Sex, Mysticism, and Misogyny

To contemporary literary and cultural critics, probably the most strikingly traditional and conservative aspect of *On the Road* is its representation of women. Reproducing a popular American literary and social stereotype, Kerouac portrays women both as the treasure Sal searches for, believing they will provide love, sex, and enlightenment, and as the means by which men lose their freedom and are forced to accept oppressive social responsibilities. In a 1963 essay on Kerouac, Eliot D. Allen praises Kerouac's portrayal of

jazz music and the road, but explains that "with all his wisdom and experience, he gives a strangely distorted picture of American women": "One reason why Mr. Kerouac's women are so inarticulate is that they have no ideas, perhaps even no minds. Their lives are completely physical [...]. They eat, drink, occasionally cook meals, make love, have babies, or sit waiting for their wandering men to return" (505, 506). Though Sal summarizes his desire to travel as aesthetically motivated--"I was a young writer and I wanted to take off" (11)--the first reason he gives for his feelings of cynicism and desire for adventure relate to "the miserably weary split-up" (3) with his first wife. We are never given the details of this relationship or why it ended, but the break-up has clearly affected Sal, resulting in "a serious illness" and a desire to escape New York and go west where he hopes he will find "girls, visions, everything"(11). Like Dean, for whom "sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life" (4), Sal mixes sex, love, and vague mysticism, making women central to his quest; unfortunately, realization rarely meets expectation, so Sal usually leaves the women he meets, hoping the next one will be *the* one: "Everything was being mixed up, and all was falling. I knew my affair with Lucille wouldn't much last longer. She wanted me to be *her* way" (125). One begins to wonder if Sal's idealization of women is a reaction to his divorce: having suffered through the ending of his marriage, Sal seems to remain convinced that he need only find the right woman to make him happy, and that the relationship will involve a perfect match which will not require him sacrificing his freedom or compromising his role as a man and an artist.

This traditional mix of idealization and vilification of women is exemplified more clearly by Dean, the American hero who refuses to be tamed by the women he constantly pursues. Dean claims 'Oh I love, love, love women! I think women are wonderful! I love women!" and justifies his mistreatment of his wives and children through the same vague mystical ideas about love and the soul. He says to Sal (in a passage suggesting Kerouac's criticism of Dean?), "'I've always dug your feelings, and now in fact you're ready to hook up with a real great girl if you can only find her and cultivate her make her mind your soul as I have tried so hard with these damned women of mine. Shit! shit! shit!' he yelled" (186). We discover Dean's idea of what a perfect wife should be when Dean and Sal accompany "a colored guy named Walter" (203) back to his place and meet his

wife, who Sal explains "never asked Walter where he'd been, what time it was, nothing" but only "smiled and smiled as we repeated the insane thing all over again. She never said a word." Dean says after they leave, "'Now you see man, there's a *real* woman for you. Never a harsh word, never a complaint, or modified; her old man can come in at any hour of the night with anybody and have talks in the kitchen and drink the beer and leave any old time. This is a man, and that's his castle'" (203). Unlike Walter, Dean has not found the "perfect" woman who will let him do what he pleases with whom and when he pleases.

Dean clearly believes that it is the women's failure to understand and accept his soul, which seems to mean his need for personal, sexual and financial freedom, which has forced him to abandon them but Sal, and Kerouac, seem unconvinced by Dean's argument. In "Part Three," Kerouac includes a long section in which several women whom Sal and Dean know criticize Dean for his treatment of his wife Camille: "'I think Marylou was very, very wise leaving you, Dean,' said Galatea. 'For years now you haven't had any sense of responsibility for anyone'" (193). Sal defends Dean, but at other times he seems to recognize the misogynistic nature of his and Dean's perception and treatment of women. When Dean complains that Marylou is "after me; she won't understand how much I love her, she's knitting my doom,'" Sal responds in a rare moment of insight--"'the truth of the matter is we don't understand our women; we blame on them and it's all our fault'"--to which Dean responds in his usual way: "'But it isn't as simple as that,' Dean warned. 'Peace will come suddenly, we won't understand when it does--see, man?'" (122).

Sal seems to see through Dean's rationalizations, but not to a point where he can abandon his own romantic ideas about love and women. Sal goes on the road to find adventure and excitement, but also to find a woman to marry, for he hopes to replace the memories of the failure of his first marriage and to restore his faith in the possibility of love without compromise. As I will argue later, Sal finds Dean and the road exciting, but his true desire is to find love so he can leave the road, get married and once again settle down. He tells Dean at the beginning of "Part Two," "I want to marry a girl [...] so I can rest my soul with her until we both get old. This can't go on all the time--all this franticness and jumping around. We've got to go someplace, find something" (116). Sal

does eventually leave the road, and Dean, when he finds "the girl with the pure and innocent dear eyes that I had always searched for and for so long" (306), leaving the reader to question how much Sal has learned about how women remain stereotyped by the seemingly rebellious and freedom-seeking Beats.

In his *Life* magazine article, "The Only Rebellion Around," Paul O'Neill says of the Beat movement, "it is a curious rebellion--unplanned, unorganized and based on a thousand personal neuroses and a thousand conflicting egos, but it is oddly effective withal. No matter what else it may be, it is not boring, and in the U.S. of the 1950s it is the only rebellion around" (242). Despite O'Neill's failure to recognize its growing existence, there was another revolution which was beginning in the mid-fifties, though it would take Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) to fully articulate its challenge to mainstream society. This was the feminist movement which was represented, though not in terms as clear as Friedan's, by the best-selling novel *Peyton Place* (1956), by Grace Metalious, a novel which, according to Ardis Cameron, "In ways that would foreshadow the modern feminist movement [...], turned the 'private' into the political" (xiii). Metalious wrote her novel to challenge the idealization of small town New England life, for having lived the reality behind the myth, "Female sexual agency, hypocrisy, social inequities, and class privilege replaced for Metalious the official story of 'Ye Old New England'" (Cameron x). However, Metalious would likely not have identified her novel as a source of the feminist movement even though, according to Halberstam, in the sixties and seventies "cultural detectives tracking the evolution of the feminist movement could find in her pages the emergence of the independent woman who dissented from the proscribed lives and limited opportunities reserved for women" (580). Kerouac waited almost a decade after the adventures he chronicled in *On the Road* for the Beat movement to gain recognition and popularity, and similarly Metalious was, in Charles K. Davis' words, "on the cutting edge of a movement that had not yet arrived and still had no voice" (259).[6]

Like *On the Road*, *Peyton Place* is a novel about a main character who dreams of being a writer and of escaping the narrow middle-class values and social role she is expected to accept. But the difference in the gender of these two main characters creates

the very different forms of rebellion which are available to these two aspiring writers. While Sal is able to go on the road when he chooses, wiring his aunt for money when he needs it, the road is not as available to Allison, who as a young girl does not have the financial or social independence to simply leave the town she finds so oppressive. Instead, she dreams of a future that will give her the independence to avoid what she believes is the trap into which most women are forced. Allison's friend Kathy says to Allison when they are twelve, "When I grow up, I'm going to get married, and buy a house, and have a dozen children" to which Allison replies, "Well, I'm not!" [...]. I am going to be a brilliant authoress. Absolutely brilliant. And I shall never marry" (91). Shortly before high school graduation, Allison again articulates her criticism of Kathy's plans: "Marriage is for clods, and if you go and get married the way you plan, Kathy, that will be the end of your artistic career. Marriage is stultifying" (212). "I am going to move away," said Allison, "as fast as ever I can after I finish high school. I'm going to Barnard College. That's in New York City." Kathy explains that she plans to marry her high school sweetheart, stay in Peyton Place and "*buy* a house after we get married," to which Allison replies, "What's so extra about that? All married people buy houses eventually. It's all part of the whole stultifying, stupid pattern." (222)

Allison does finally escape to New York, but she is forced to write conservative, uninspired stories for *McCall's* to pay the bills. Her mother describes one of the stories to Allison's stepfather, about

> "a career girl who wants her boss's job. This boss of hers is young and handsome and the girl can't help herself. She falls in love with him. In the end she marries him, after deciding she loves him more than her career."
>
> "Good God," said Tom and closed the magazine. "I wonder if she has done anything with that novel she was thinking of doing." (271-2)

Faced with economic necessity and the fact that reinforcing stereotypes in magazine stories is easier and pays better than writing rebellious novels which challenge those stereotypes, Allison continues to experience the difficulties of being a woman writer searching for independence in the fifties.

Peyton Place was initially a far more popular novel than *On the Road*--David

Halberstam describes Metalious' novel as "not so much a book as an event, with a force all its own" for by "1966 there were some 10 million copies in print" (579)--but its popularity has not survived, for neither the novel nor its author have been mythologized in the way Kerouac has, and one can no longer find a copy of *Peyton Place*,[7] while all of Kerouac's novels remain in print. Although their lives had many parallels--both were lower middle-class, from New England but with French-Canadian roots, both enjoyed early success which they could not handle, so both drank themselves to death--only Kerouac was embraced as articulating American themes, and misperceived as embodying the rebellious energy and adventurousness he chronicled in *On the Road*. Steven Watson explains how

> His ravenous audience--critics and fans alike--identified Kerouac with the manic protagonist Dean Moriarty rather than the observer Sal Paradise. The public saw Kerouac as an ecstatic, virile, latter-day cowboy, [...] a Lothario whose sexual drive and appetite for drugs were limitless, an iconoclastic hipster with radical values. Kerouac embodied an icon so remote from his personality, his friend John Clellon Holmes observed "he no longer knew who the hell he was supposed to be." (Watson 256)

In contrast, Metalious was usually seen as the author of a titillating best-seller which caused a sensation--historian James T. Patterson describes her as rushing "to ride on the big business of sex" (359) opened up by *Playboy* magazine--but which had little depth or complexity, and thus no place in the American literary canon. Although later feminists would recognize that "Metalious celebrated female sexuality and positioned women at the centre of sexual relations, politicizing both the female body and attempts to control it" (Cameron xiv), Metalious "never fully articulated her own feminist vision and probably would have been surprised had someone told her that one day she would be a heroine of the women's movement. But she was not slick and she did not know how to romanticize her own story" (Halberstam 581). *Peyton Place* was about the American home in a small town, and about a young woman's wish to escape it, but it involved no exciting quest across America and no larger than life hero (or author) who symbolized American rebelliousness and the search for innocence and freedom.

The Oppressiveness of "White Ambitions:" Romanticizing Racial Otherness

In addition to its misogynistic representation of women, *On the Road* also remains troubling in its representation of race, and particularly of African Americans. Writing at a time when African American culture was largely invisible to middle-class America, and when non-whites were often excluded from the suburbs which middle-class youth so wished to escape, Kerouac exposed his readers to a world of jazz and drugs and sex which they could not find portrayed in mainstream novels, film or television. When *On the Road* was published in 1957, the involvement, and even awareness, among northern whites about the racism in the South was only beginning. The Supreme Court passed Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954, desegregating schools, and Rosa Parks began the Montgomery, Alabama bus strike as a protest against segregation in 1955, acts seen as landmark events for African Americans. But while these events sparked violent reaction among whites in the South, they had little influence on the lives of Northern white, middle-class Americans. As James T. Patterson argues,

> most white Americans had never paid much attention to the plight of minorities--whether they were Indians, Asians, Mexicans or blacks--and for the remainder of the decade they did not much bestir themselves to improve race relations in the nation. Martin Luther King notwithstanding, they seemed more interested in enjoying the blessings of the Biggest Boom Yet [prosperity, material consumption, etc.]. It was not until the 1960s, when a massive increase in civil rights activism arose, that they were forced to sit up and take notice. (406)

Kerouac wrote *On the Road* long before the Civil Rights movement gained momentum in the North, but Kerouac had first hand experience of the segregation of African Americans in the South. In 1948 while in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, he wrote about it in a letter to Neal Cassady:

> Here I am in a shack, writing on a board table, as it rains, and as the radio plays colored music in this land where the colored are pushed back & scorned & "kept in their place." And Neal, there's a woman named

> Mahalia Jackson who sings real sad, while, in the background on another station, there's white audience laughter from some contest show in Nashville, Tenn. You see how it makes me feel, don't you? I didn't come here to mourn the Negro's lot, but I do. (Kerouac 1995, 165)

Given his awareness of segregation and racism and his seeming sympathy for their oppression, one has to wonder why Kerouac chose to portray African Americans as inhabiting a world more exciting and less restrictive than that of mainstream America, thus romanticizing African Americans rather than accurately representing their experiences of racism, poverty, and marginalization.

One explanation is that as in the case of women, Kerouac may be creating a distance between himself and his narrator. Truman Capote said of *On the Road* "Writing! That's not writing, it's just ... typing" (Cook 96), a remark which reflects the popular myth that *On the Road* was written in three weeks on a role of teletype paper. Though this myth fit with Kerouac's later theories about "Spontaneous Poetics,"[8] it also reinforced the idea that *On the Road* was simple autobiography, Sal Paradise a thinly disguised Jack Kerouac. But as Tim Hunt has argued, "*On the Road* was three and a half years in the writing, and in that time Kerouac worked on at least five distinct versions of the book" (77). Central to Kerouac's revisions was the decision concerning his narrator, for Kerouac did not see himself as simply writing a confessional autobiography: according to Hunt, Kerouac experimented with several narrators and narrative perspectives, and between 1950 and 1952, much of "Kerouac's work on *On the Road* centered around his attempts to master first-person narrative" (98). I believe that Kerouac consciously portrays Sal as self-centered, naively romantic,[9] and finally very middle-class in his attitudes and values. Early in his travels, Sal meets a hobo named Mississippi Gene, and explains that "although Gene was white, there was something of the wise and tired old Negro in him" (28). Sal believes that African Americans have a freedom and spirituality not shared by the more material-minded white middle-class, but which Sal hopes he can experience during his travels across America:

> We dodged a mule wagon; in it sat an old Negro plodding along. 'Yes!' yelled Dean. 'Yes! Dig him! Now consider his soul--stop a while and

> consider.' And he slowed down the car for all of us to turn and look at the old jazzbo moaning along. 'Oh yes, dig him sweet; now there's thoughts in that mind that I would give my last arm to know; to climb in there and find out just what he's poor-ass pondering about this years turnip greens and ham.' (113)

Sal and Dean seem to simultaneously envy this "old Negro" his simple life, yet there is also a clear note of condescension regarding the simplicity and limitations of his life and thoughts.

Readers and critics have often read Sal's romanticizing of racial Otherness as symbolic of Sal gaining wisdom from a world more pure and spiritual than the suburbs he left behind. As recently as 1990, for example, critic Gregory Stephenson argued that

> in contrast to the sterility and futility that Sal associates with the American dream of the mid-century [...] he experiences a simpler, truer, more pious, more joyous, and more meaningful way of life among the primitives and the fellahin. Sal is nourished and revitalized through contact with the energies and mysteries of primitives in the outer world and with the primitive inside himself. (23)

This reinforcing of the traditional myth of the noble savage, the romantic assumption that the world of Mexicans and African Americans is primitive, and as such it can offer wisdom and experiences unavailable in the civilized world, helped create the feelings of excitement and adventure readers found in *On the Road*, and thus contributed greatly to its popularity. Yet, as I will argue later, Kerouac also uses Sal's assumptions about Otherness to reveal Sal's conservative values and his desire to finally return to the middle-class world he has briefly left behind.

It is understandable that Paul O'Neill may not have recognized the beginnings of a feminist revolution in 1959, but one has to wonder whether he made a conscious decision not to mention the revolution against racism and segregation which was being fought by African Americans in the South, and which for decades had been articulated by African American writers. Before *On the Road* portrayed its romantic vision of African Americans, with their easy going nature, primitive wisdom and cool jazz, Richard Wright

in *Native Son* (1940) had articulated the sense of alienation and frustration experienced by African Americans deprived of a sense of identity and voice. Though Northern whites, when they thought of the issue at all, usually perceived racism and segregation as a Southern problem, Wright argues that the experience of racism in northern cities is even worse, because many African Americans had migrated north on the assumption that they would escape marginalization and find available the rights and opportunities denied them in the South.[10] As Wright explains in his essay "How Bigger was Born,"

> the urban environment of Chicago, affording a more stimulating life, made the Negro Bigger Thomases react more violently than even in the South [...]. It was not that Chicago segregated Negroes more than the South, but that Chicago had more to offer, that Chicago's physical aspect--noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power and fulfillment--did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction more obstreperous than in the South. (xv)

Wright says of Bigger Thomas, "he is [the] product of a dislocated society; he is a dispossessed and disinherited man; he is all of this, and he lives amid the greatest plenty on earth and he is looking and feeling for a way out" (xx). Norman Mailer was later to argue that the White Negro "had absorbed the existential synapses of the Negro" (341), but Wright makes it clear that Bigger's reliance on violence is not part of an existential philosophy, but a practical necessity in the context of racial violence:

> He was going among white people, so he would take his knife and his gun; it would make them feel that he was the equal of them, give him a sense of completeness. Then he thought of a good reason why he should take it; in order to get to the Dalton place, he had to go through a white neighborhood. He had not heard of any Negroes being molested recently, but he felt that it was always possible. (44)

Bigger's alienation and lack of identity is symbolized through his sense of fear and through his lack of voice: throughout the novel he remains unable to articulate his frustration in words, resorting instead to angry, misguided violence.[11]

In Ralph Ellsion's novel *Invisible Man* (1952), which I will discuss in more detail in "Chapter Six," Ellison's narrator explains that he is invisible

> simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me. (3)

Sal discovers on his travels what he feels is an exciting world largely unexplored by middle-class whites like himself, but when Sal looks at African Americans, he does not see their marginalization and poverty, or their efforts to fight against racism, or the existence of a culture with its own history and traditions. Sal sees only jazz, sex, and freedom, and feels frustration and envy because he sees himself as trapped by the middle-class expectations he is trying to escape. What Sal fails to recognize is that he has a choice to live this way: when he finds life on the road becoming difficult, he writes his Aunt for money, or simply returns to the comforts of her house to write about his adventures. Sal's romanticizing is a form of racism that Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and other novelists tried to challenge by articulating the anger and frustration of African Americans. Sal does reveal a vibrant African American culture previously unseen by fifties middle-class youth, but he portrays it in a way which largely fails to recognize his own social advantages, as well as the cost of the poverty and social and political exclusion he so desires to experience.

Kerouac clearly articulates Sal's social privilege through the relationship between Sal and Terry. In Terry, Sal believes he has found "my kind of girlsoul" (82), a Mexican woman who is more exotic than the women he has previously met, but Kerouac quickly shows Sal's feelings of class and cultural superiority surfacing after their first fight: "I got mad and realized I was pleading with a dumb little Mexican wench" (84). While Terry sees Sal as "a nice boy" who will be responsible and maybe settle down with her and her child, Sal immediately begins to chafe against the realities of a relationship set against the backdrop of poverty. Seeing interesting people on the streets of Los Angeles, Sal explains how he "wanted to meet them all, talk to everybody, but Terry and I were too busy trying

to get a buck together" (86). Sal lives with Terry briefly, and proudly explains how a group of Okies "thought I was a Mexican, of course; and in a way I am" (97), yet when Sal begins to find the work too hard and the poverty too oppressive, he simply abdicates any responsibility for Terry: "I was through with my chores in the cottonfield. I could feel the pull of my old life pulling me back." Unlike Terry and the other Mexican workers, Sal can simply send his "aunt a penny postcard and [ask] for another fifty" (98) to get him home to the comfort of his aunt's house, where he can begin to write about the people and places he has visited.

It is later, when wandering through Denver feeling lonely, that Sal articulates his belief in the oppressiveness of being a white, middle-class male:

> At the lilac evening I walked [...] wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night [...]. I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. All my life I'd had white ambitions; that's why I had abandoned a good woman like Terry in the San Joaquin Valley. (180)

Sal fails to recognize the problems faced by those he romanticizes, as well as the fact that he had the chance to remain with Terry, but found the work and the responsibilities too difficult. He does admit to his "white ambitions," but sees them only as a burden, never admitting the privileges he enjoys as a middle-class white male who can travel and live among the poor and disenfranchised, but who can return to his middle-class world when the road stop offering easy "kicks."

Kerouac further reinforces the ironic distance between himself and Sal in a passage which follows Sal's reflections on his leaving Terry. Continuing his wanderings through Denver, Sal comes upon a neighbourhood baseball game, and reflects on the happiness of the people he sees, contrasting their feelings of simple contentment with his own sense of loneliness and "white sorrows":

> There was excitement and the air was filled with the vibration of really joyous life that knows nothing of disappointment and "white sorrows" and

> all that. The old Negro man had a can of beer in his coat pocket, which he proceeded to open, and the old white man enviously eyed the can and groped in his pocket to see if he could buy a can too. How I died! I walked away from there. (181)

Sal dreams of a life where something as simple as a beer at a baseball game can give such satisfaction, a life he contrasts with his own more psychic and spiritual needs. Kerouac juxtaposes this scene with one which clearly reveals Sal's privileged position, and thus undermines Sal's belief that his life is so much more difficult than those of the poor, ethnic minorities of which he wishes he could be part:

> I went to see a rich girl I knew. In the morning she pulled a hundred-dollar bill out of her silk stocking and said, "you've been talking of a trip to Frisco; this being the case, take this and go and have your fun." So all my problems were solved and I got a travel-bureau car for eleven dollars' gas-fare to Frisco and zoomed over the land. (181)

Sal seems to mourn his position in the world when he runs out of money, but he always finds the money to continue his trip, and as long as he knows he can get away or get home, he forgets his sadness and starts to rediscover the excitement and adventure that financial freedom can buy. Though readers have shared Sal's sense of excitement and his belief that they can discover a more spiritually satisfying world "among the primitives and the fellahin," Kerouac seems to recognize that the ability to search for this world relies on the privileges that accompany the responsibilities from which his largely white, middle-class audience longs to escape.

Creating the Myth of Dean Moriarty

Much of the excitement and adventure which Sal experiences in *On the Road* involves the romantic (mis)perception of women and African Americans, but the primary focus of Kerouac's novel involves exploring the relationship between Sal and Dean Moriarty. Though he portrays Sal's feelings for Dean as at times bordering on religious faith and at other times as ambivalent and even skeptical, Kerouac focuses his novel on how Sal remembers Dean and their relationship while Sal recounts the adventures which make up

Sal's narrative. I will argue that Sal's perception of Dean changes, and that because Sal cannot maintain a relationship with Dean while on the road, he instead chooses to represent Dean as a symbol of an older, freer American masculinity which Sal portrays as having been lost, but which he can remember with a warm sense of nostalgia.

Like jazz, Terry, and the African Americans Sal seems to envy, Dean is a source of fascination to Sal because of his Otherness. Unlike Sal, who has grown up in relative middle-class comfort and gone to college, Dean is of the road and not just on it. As Sal explains, "Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles" (3). Bored with college and with his New York friends, whom he describes as either "intellectuals" or "slinking criminals" who were all "in the negative, nightmarish position of putting down society and giving their bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons" (10), Sal sees Dean as a young man excited by life and possessing an insight and energy which Sal has not found in his middle-class college life:

> Dean's intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his "criminality" was not something that skulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the plains, something new, long-prophesied, long-acoming (he only stole cars for joy rides). (10)

To Sal, Dean is a breath of fresh air, a modern day Huck Finn, a "long-lost brother," Sal explains, whose "suffering bony face with long side-burns and [...] straining muscular sweating neck made me remember my boyhood in those dye-dumps and swimming holes and riversides of Paterson and the Passaic" (10). When Sal goes on the road the first time, he has not yet met Dean, but Sal is inspired by feelings of excitement and nostalgia to hit the road and learn more about this "young jailkid shrouded in mystery" (4)

Dean represents a traditional masculinity defined by energy and a wish for freedom and movement, a masculinity Kerouac, among others, believed middle-class society of the fifties was trying to destroy. Sal's "first impression of Dean was a young Gene Autry--trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent--a sideburned hero of the snowy

West" (5).[12] Dean is attractive to Sal, and to Kerouac's readers, because he is "a youth tremendously excited with life" (6) who challenges the social forces--a middle-class focus on money, career, and families--they believed were constraining their own lives. As Tim Hunt argues, "Sal admires Dean's freedom from social constraints, and his ability to ignore social patterns. Dean is a 'natural' and Sal sees in that a traditional American ethos more fundamental than the Protestant work ethic. Dean is Whitman's (and R. W. B. Lewis's) 'American Adam'" (22). Sal says of Dean how "his dirty workclothes clung to him so gracefully, as though you couldn't buy a better fit from a custom tailor but only earn it from the Natural Tailor of Natural Joy, as Dean had" (10). Dean is clearly portrayed as the "natural man," and as an example of the energy and experience of an older, freer American masculinity.

Though Sal is attracted to Dean's energy and desire to move, Kerouac clearly portrays Sal as divided in his perception of Dean. Dean spurs Sal to leave the East and travel across America, and Sal finds Dean an endless source of "kicks," but at the same time Sal realizes that, in the words of Camille, one of Dean's ex-wives, "'Dean will leave you out in the cold any time it's in his interest'" (170). Sal at times celebrates Dean's philosophy--"'you've got to look out for your boy. He ain't a man 'less he's a jumpin man [...]. I'll tell you Sal, straight, no matter where I live, my trunk's always sticking out from under the bed'" (251)--yet he is also frustrated by the very need to move which makes Dean interesting to him, but which precludes their ability to create and maintain an emotionally satisfying relationship: "suddenly we were passing the place where Terry and I had sat under the moon, drinking wine, on those bum crates, in October 1947, and I tried to tell him. But he was too excited" (168). Though Sal tours Dean's world of poverty and sex and alcohol, Sal's "white ambitions" make him dream of taking Dean off the road so that they can settle down in a world of domestic tranquility. Sal proposes that he and Dean leave all Dean's women and responsibilities behind and go off to Italy (188-90), a plan that fails because Dean cannot commit himself to this goal. Feeling frustrated with his life on the road--"the raggedy madness of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness. Pitiful forms of ignorance" (254)--Sal finally admits, "All I hope, Dean, is that someday

we'll be able to live on the same street with our families and get to be a couple of oldtimers together" (254). Sal has been drawn into Dean's world and been inspired by Dean's desire for freedom and excitement, but ironically what Sal really desires is to bring Dean into the world of suburban stability and familial responsibility.

George Dardess has argued that *On the Road* is "a delicately constructed account of the relation between the narrator, Sal Paradise, and his friend Dean Moriarty--an account built according to a classic dramatic design. *On the Road* is a love story, not a travelog (and certainly not a call to Revolution)" (127). If the novel is a love story, it is a story of unrequited love, for Sal is unable to establish a lasting relationship with Dean. Sal is caught in a paradox: he is drawn to Dean because he is full of energy and desires freedom and movement, yet these qualities which attract Sal to Dean are also the source of Sal's frustration. If Sal were to convince Dean to settle down and live in Sal's world of domestic bliss and familial responsibility, Dean would cease to be the source of fascination and inspiration to Sal, and would become just another guy accepting the role society has given him. Frustrated by his inability to contain Dean physically and emotionally, Sal instead captures Dean through the act of memory and narration, rendering him forever the young, energetic symbol of American masculinity.

Kerouac establishes a distinction between the Sal who is on the road, and the Sal who looks back on his experiences, and Dean, with a more critical eye. From the beginning, Sal describes his time with Dean as "the part of my life you could call my life on the road," (3) a period which is now in the past. The Dean that Sal leaves behind, "ragged in a moth eaten overcoat" (309), is older and less energetic; Sal prefers to think of him as he was when Sal and Dean were younger, "far back, when Dean was not the way he is today" (4). Sal transforms Dean from an irresponsible, troubled man into a symbol, making him "the HOLY GOOF" (194), "that mad Ahab at the wheel" (234), "a burning, shuddering, frightful Angel, palpitating toward me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed, pursuing me like the Shrouded Traveler across the plain" (259). Sal has tired of Dean and his need to always be on the move, leaving women with children, leaving Sal sick in Mexico, always beyond the reach of Sal or anyone else who wants to establish a close and lasting relationship with Dean. Through the act of

narration, Sal captures Dean's attractive and frustrating energy, finally controlling Dean by portraying him as a dynamic symbol of a disappearing masculine ideal.

Sal takes comfort in a warm feeling of nostalgia for Dean and the time they spent together, a comfort he gains through time and distance from Dean and the road. Now living with Laura, having found the love and peace Dean could not give him, Sal can finish his narrative with a warm glow of memory which covers over the ambivalence and frustration which defined his relationship with Dean: "So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast [...] I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty" (310). Sal ends his novel by warmly remembering the places and people he has left to establish his life as a writer and husband, and it is an ending which evokes the same mythic qualities as the closing words of *The Great Gatsby*. As Tim Hunt explains, "*On the Road* ends with a lyric passage that evokes what has become a quintessentially American mixture of past and present, dream and nightmare, hope and nostalgia" (73).

Many critics have argued that Sal experiences a process of learning through his time on the road, and that the Sal who narrates the story has gained wisdom and insight through his relationship with Dean. Carole Vopat argues that "Sal's growth as an adult can be measured through his responses to Dean and in the changing aspects of their relationship" (449). Regina Weinrich argues that "it does not matter [...] that Dean fails to reach or even embody the goals of his quest for lasting values. What matters instead is that Sal as narrator reaches the goal for which Dean is a catalyst--the understanding and freedom which comes of telling his tale, celebrating the fact that he is both alive and free" (38-9). Despite Sal's recognition that Dean and the road finally cannot offer what he is searching for--love--he has not abandoned all of his romantic ideals. He maintains his belief that finding the right woman will bring him contentment, and leaves the road when he meets Laura, with whom he can embrace the middle-class life of security he could not have with Dean or with Terry. Nevertheless, Sal's nostalgic closing to his narrative suggests he has not gained a real insight into the social advantages which allow him to

travel for kicks and then leave the road when he pleases. He speaks of "Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found," but does not recognize that Dean's search for his father is a search for a sense of origin, a sense of family and home that Sal takes for granted. Sal romanticizes Dean and later covers over his faults with his feelings of nostalgia and his desire to make Dean a symbol of a past America, but Sal never recognizes the social and economic realities that keep someone like Dean on the road. Sal has found love, and it is love that he believes solves his problems. One feels no sense that Sal has gained true insight into the misogyny which underlies his idealizing of women, or into the realities of poverty and racism in America, and his closing words suggest that Sal prefers to remember Dean and his world with a mild longing and a comforting sense of nostalgia.

Notes

1. Asked "If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be?" actor Scott Speedman, the twenty-three year old "heartthrob of the W[arner] B[ros.]'s *Felicity*" (a popular series of the 1998 television season), answered "I'd love to have a couple of drinks with Jack Kerouac. *On the Road* is a kind of bible for my generation" (Simpson 196).

2. Critic Lionel Trilling argued that *The Lonely Crowd* was "one of the most important books about America to be published in recent times" (85), describing it as a book which undertook "the investigation and criticism of morals and manners" (86), a responsibility Trilling felt most contemporary novelists had abandoned.

3. Bruce Cook argues that

> there is something a little too easy, perhaps, in associating the Beat protest with left radicalism, as so many have done. For a number of good reasons that was the direction that it took. But what the movement was, essentially, was apolitical--a last-ditch stand for individualism against conformity. That, anyhow, was how Jack Kerouac saw it, and he was present at the creation. (85)

4. Despite his radical politics regarding society, and his criticism of the largely

conservative nature of *On the Road*, Goodman seems to share with Kerouac a traditional attitude toward women. I have argued that *On the Road* appeals largely to young middle-class men for it represents their anxieties and desire to rebel, and Goodman suggests that *Growing Up Absurd* is aimed at that same audience, for as he argues, "our 'youth troubles' are boys' troubles":

> the problems I want to discuss in this book belong primarily, in our society, to the boys: how to be useful and make something of oneself. A girl does not *have* to, she is not expected to, "make something" of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying like any other natural or creative act. (13)

5. In addition to cuts and changes required by his editor--the manuscript for *On the Road* was 450 pages at one point--Kerouac also practiced self-censorship. Kerouac portrays Dean Moriarty, based on Neal Cassady, as a man who is very successful with women, but leaves out the fact that Neal was bisexual, and that his relationship with Allen Ginsberg (Carlo Marx in the novel) was not solely intellectual, as it is described in the novel, but also sexual. Portraying Dean as bisexual would have made the novel far more challenging to mainstream values, but I doubt that Kerouac and *On the Road* would have enjoyed the same popularity.

6. Cameron argues that not only did *Peyton Place* challenge traditional assumptions about female sexuality and small town life, it also "called into question the normative boundaries of middlebrow reading and the literary rules of cultural authorities" (viii).

7. I had been unable to locate a copy of *Peyton Place*, new or used, to purchase, so I relied on a public library copy, as I could not find a copy in the University of Alberta library system. Fortunately, a new edition was published in 1999 by Northeastern University Press with an excellent introduction by Ardis Cameron, who explores, among other topics, why "Even among cultural critics who have begun to remap the territory of writing's publics and explore reading practices, *Peyton Place* remains on the academic sidelines" (xvii).

8. Tim Hunt's book *Kerouac's Crooked Road* is an invaluable aid in dispelling the many myths that surround the composition of *On the Road*. Discussing Kerouac's decision to

"just write it down as fast as I can, exactly like it happened, all in a rush," Hunt argues that "Kerouac's comments to [John Clellon] Holmes suggest that initially Kerouac thought of this April 1951 experiment, what he later called the twenty-one day *On the Road*, as a ploy to clarify his thoughts that would in turn allow him to write his book, rather than as an attempt to write the book itself" (110). David Brinkley says of Kerouac,

> Given his infatuation with the spontaneity of jazz, it is not surprising that Kerouac preferred the image of a natural-born, wild-eyed Rimbaud-like genius to that of a careful cobbler of words like John O'Hara. But Kerouac was a fastidious, old-fashioned *craftsman*. For every day he spent "on the road" during his lifetime, gathering material, he toiled for a month in solitude sketching, polishing, and typing his various novels, prayers, poems and reflections. (51)

9. Tim Hunt explains that

> earlier versions of *On the Road* demonstrate Kerouac's interest in narrators whose naivete has thematic purpose. In his notes for the second version, the character Smitty who will be the hero's Boswell is to be too saintly for this world, and Kerouac likens him to Pip and Sancho Panza. In the third version, *Pic*, the full name of the narrator and hero, Pictorial Review, suggests his childlike directness, and in *On the Road* as in *Pic*, Sal's full name, Salvatore Paradise, calls attention to a Candide-like nature. Sal overlooks whatever might threaten his faith that the world will willingly conform to his wants. (4)

Sal's belief that "the world will willingly conform to his wants" suggests not only Sal's naivete, but his assumption of identity and social and economic privilege that he carries with him on the road.

10. Twenty-five years after Wright published *Native Son*, the myth of freedom in northern cities and the reality of northern racism remained an issue in African American writing. In his play *Blues for Mister Charlie*, James Baldwin articulates the continuing unofficial segregation found in cities like New York and Chicago:

> Richard: I convinced Daddy that I'd be better off in New York--and Edna,

> she convinced him too, she said it wasn't as tight for a black man up there as it is down here. Well, that's a crock, Grandmama, believe me when I tell you. At first I thought it was true, hell, I was just a green country boy and they ain't no signs up, dig, saying you can't go here or you can't go there. No, you got to find that out all by your lonesome. (34)

11. Wright's portrayal of the African American experience as one of alienation leading to violence, though influential among African American writers, focused almost exclusively on the experience of African American men and their struggle for identity. Wright strongly criticized Zora Neale Hurston for being unpolitical, because she focused on celebrating African American culture and the experiences of women. As a result, Hurston's work was largely forgotten until Alice Walker "rediscovered" Hurston's writings while searching for an African American female literary tradition. Lorraine Hansberry's play 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* also addresses issues of racism and the struggle to gain a sense of manhood, but she explores how these issues influence different members of a poor African American family. Hansberry does not portray a single experience of racism, but explores how age, education, class, and gender influence the experiences and self-perception of African Americans.

12. David Brinkley argues that "Kerouac sought to depict his fascinatingly inchoate friend Neal Cassady as the modern-day equivalent of the Wild West legends Jim Bridger, Pecos Bill and Jesse James" and explains that Kerouac's "diaries teem with references to 'folk heroes' and praise for Zane Grey's honest drifters, Herman Melville's confidence men, and Babe Ruth's feats on the diamond and in the barroom" (50).

CHAPTER FOUR: Momism and "Beset Manhood": Sex-Role Theory in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

At the end of *On the Road*, Sal leaves Dean on the streets of New York, preferring to remember him and their time together nostalgically before Dean begins to undermine the myth Sal has created around him. In reality, Kerouac and Neal Cassady had drifted apart, Neal taking up with Ken Kesey, the writer who would come to represent a new generation of novelists critical of society's growing conformity:

> In the summer [of 1964] Neal was again in New York, but he was now more of a stranger to Jack than an old friend. Neal was the driver for a troupe of acid head dropouts from society, protohippies known as the Merry Pranksters. The Pranksters were led by Ken Kesey, the Oregonian woodsman novelist who had migrated to California after reading *On the Road*. Jack had liked Kesey's first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, but he must have felt some enmity to find Kesey becoming the anode for a new generation--a generation he considered "disrespectful" and "illiterate." (Nicosia 653)[1]

Nicosia here points out how Kerouac appears a social and literary conservative when compared to Kesey and the "new generation" of the 60s, but Nicosia also makes clear that Kesey was inspired and influenced by Kerouac's novel, an idea borne out by elements which Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* shares with *On the Road*.

Like Dean, whom Kerouac describes as "a con-man" who "was only conning because he wanted so much to live" (6), Kesey's main character Randle Patrick McMurphy is "a good old red, white, and blue hundred-per-cent American con man" (254) who is defined by his rebelliousness and energy, the same character traits which draw Sal to Dean. McMurphy sees himself as a "dedicated lover" (245), though both Dean and McMurphy seem more interested in unencumbered sex than commitment, which is presented as part of the reason they have managed to escape the rules of society and maintain their freedom. John Tytell argues that "the sign of Dean's freedom is his infectious laughter. In the novel, laughter--even in the presence of despair--becomes a

kind of life-force, a token of spirit; merely to laugh at the world, like the existentialist ability to say no, becomes a valuable source of inspiration for Kerouac" (334). It is McMurphy's laughter that announces his presence, and uniqueness, when he arrives at the asylum:

> Nobody can tell exactly why he laughs; there's nothing funny going on. But it's not the way that Public Relation laughs, it's free and loud and it comes out of that wide grinning mouth and spreads its rings bigger and bigger till it's lapping against the walls all over the ward. Not like that fat Public Relation laugh. This sounds real. I realize all of a sudden it's the first laugh I've heard in years. (11)

McMurphy, like Dean, is the traditional American hero who is searching for freedom and fighting against a system that wants to "sivilize" him.

Like *On the Road*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a novel which has been read as challenging society's conformity and materialism, but Kesey's vision of society as an asylum which contains and attempts to fix nonconformists suggests a much darker vision than Kerouac's, for in Kesey's novel, one cannot simply jump on and off the road as one pleases. Kerouac portrays Sal and his friends as characters who are simply bored with middle-class values and are looking for kicks, and his novel is less concerned with changing society than with briefly escaping it, and with portraying the experiences and insights which help make Sal a writer. Not an explicitly political novel, *On the Road* is rather, in James C. McKelly's words, "a novel [that] at times reads like the chronicle of a bourgeois aesthete's excursion into hopelessness, a portrait of the artist as a young tourist" (296). In contrast, Kesey focuses on the dangerous influence of social norms, his novel portraying how "the Combine" undermines the individual's ability to resist, or even recognize, mainstream society's oppressiveness. During the fishing trip, for example, Chief Bromden watches "a train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects, half-life things" and sees "five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine," houses that "looked so much alike that, time and time again, the kids went home by mistake to different houses and different families. Nobody ever noticed" (227-8). As Jerome

Klinkowitz argues, "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was one of the first novels to deal imaginatively with the hidden persuaders, the organization men, the lonely crowd and other sociological images of the fifties that characterized a world of plenty the sixties generation would not worship but fear" (114). *On the Road* also addressed these issues of conformity, but not with Kesey's explicitness or with his suggestion of how the individual might fight the powerful forces of conformity.

I argued in my last chapter that Kerouac's novel is punctuated by ambivalence and portrays a more self-centered, apolitical perception of the individual's relationship with mainstream society. *On the Road*'s popularity seems a result of its mix of excitement and adventure with feelings of sadness and nostalgia, and it has remained a popular novel but one which has only recently begun to be taught in universities.[2] *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, on the other hand, has enjoyed a popularity both inside and outside academia. According to George J. Searles writing in 1992, the novel "has sold nearly eight million copies as of this writing," (4) "is often assigned in college literature courses, and interest in Kesey's work remains widespread" (1). I would argue that, as in the case of *On the Road*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*'s mix of innovation and tradition is largely responsible for its initial and continuing popularity. Far more than Kerouac, Kesey provides a very explicit critique of society, and his position is more clearly political in that he identifies the enemy and the victims without any sense of ambivalence. The Combine is represented by Big Nurse, who McMurphy describes as "a ball-cutter" (58), and thus the nature of the novel's conflict is immediately identified: women, who represent the oppressiveness of mainstream society, are trying to emasculate men.

Although many critics have argued that this conflict is not explicitly about gender, but rather about society versus the individual, I will argue that Kesey's simplification of complex social issues to create a traditional story of good (strong man) versus evil (strong woman) is central to the novel's popularity, as is the portrayal of its hero McMurphy as a model of traditional masculinity. Falling into a long American literary tradition, Kesey's novel portrays women as either for men or against them, kindly whores or "ball-cutters." As well as continuing a literary tradition, Kesey's novel relies on a belief in clearly defined sex-roles that reflected contemporary psychological theories about the sex-role

characteristics which define men and women. McMurphy is the traditional American hero, but he is also the model of ideal masculinity according to the "Male Sex Role Index," a paradigm which psychologists used to measure masculine traits and thus a man's adjustment to his proper sex-role.[3] Kesey portrays McMurphy as the perfectly model of real masculinity, the traditional hero who, if not finally able to defeat "the matriarchy" (61), will at least teach other men how to fight to hold on to their ever-threatened masculinity.

"We are victims of a matriarchy"

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest was published five years after *On the Road*, so one can argue that Kesey and Kerouac were writing within a similar socio-historical context and, as I have suggested, were addressing similar questions about society and individual freedom in an age of conformity, though Kesey focuses more explicitly on his anxieties about the fate of individualism in the face of social pressures to conform. Robert A. Hipkiss has argued that "Kesey's loony bin is very much the American society at large, which is losing its respect for individual freedom while demanding maternal care from the Combines of government, industry and labor" (122). Madelon Heatherington explains that

> Kesey's novel is a marvelously complex anticipation of psychiatrist R.D. Laing's proposition [...] that insanity is the only sane reaction to a universe gone mad. Everything in *Cuckoo's Nest* compels us to deal with the clash between individuality and conformity, between self-definition or self-discipline and institutional prescription, even between the East and the West: East coast technology versus West coast naturalism. (82-3)

James E. Miller, Jr. sees in Kesey's novel, and in the actions of McMurphy, "The defiant assertion of one's humanity in the face of overwhelming forces that dehumanize and destroy" (400). In arguing that the McMurphy's battle with Nurse Ratched represents the conflict between the individual and society, these critics are stating implicitly what Barry H. Leeds states explicitly: "manhood, as Kesey sees it, is not merely the quality of being male but of being human" (25). Following a long tradition in American literary criticism,

Leeds universalizes male experiences into human experience, associating women with society which threatens individuality and personal freedom. In reading *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* symbolically, most critics have ignored the fact that Kesey portrays the struggle for power between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched in clearly gendered terms.

A few critics have discussed the misogynistic nature of Kesey's novel, arguing the importance of recognizing and challenging Kesey's use of gender stereotypes. Writing about Dale Wasserman's 1970 stage adaptation of the novel, Marcia L. Falk argues that the "play is not *about* conditioning nearly so much as it *is* a dangerous piece of conditioning itself. With a pseudo-radical posture, it swallows whole hog all the worst attitudes toward women prevalent in our society" (452). Elizabeth McMahan re-reads the novel as a portrayal of the victimization of women, Nurse Ratched's behaviour resulting from the inequality between the sexes. She explains that "Kesey didn't have exactly this in mind, I grant, but we can still derive this insight from his novel and correct the damaging impression that the book leaves--that women, through some innate perversity, are the cause of all of society's failings" (149). The response to these feminist interpretations of the novel has often been hostile. Writing in 1989, M. Gilbert Porter argued that

> Kesey uses sexual conflict for dramatic focus on the more encompassing matter of human distortions and vulnerabilities. To see the novel only in terms of gender is mistaking the medium for the message. To state it another way, it is always possible to find a rat turd in a silo, but it is a lot of trouble, that is not what the silo is built for, and the discovery is hardly worth the effort. (76)

If we interpret Porter's metaphor as hostile and defensive, are we mistaking the medium for the message?[4]

What is strikingly odd about the reluctance of Porter and other critics to see *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as a novel which focuses on issues of gender is the fact that it is Kesey himself who establishes the importance of gender in the novel, a fact that is apparent to scholars who have been trained to see literature as reproducing issues of power and exploitation, rather than as communicating universal themes through seemingly apolitical symbols. But the popular perception that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

represents the universal theme of the individual versus society, humanity threatened by a dehumanizing bureaucracy, brings us back to Leeds', and Kesey's, belief that manhood equals humanity. When Stephen Tanner argues that "Miss Ratched is a villain not because she is a woman, but because she is not human" and that "McMurphy's ripping open of her shell-like uniform is not a revengeful attack on a castrating bitch: It is a symbolic gesture indicating that the human must be liberated from the machine if the oppression of the Combine is to be eliminated," (47) he is either willfully overlooking the overt misogyny of how Kesey chooses to portray the main conflict of his novel, or he is simply following the ideological assumption that the male represents humanity, rather than one gender which justifies its exploitation of women by portraying them as the source of evil and oppression.

Though critics may argue against the importance of focusing on issues of gender in their celebration of Kesey's novel, their reading reveals that their assumptions about gender, like Kesey's, reflect an historical moment in a literary and cultural tradition which blames mothers, wives, and women in general for the weakness of men and the decline of American society. Writing about the women in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Terence Martin argues that they "are powerful forces of control" who "represent a sinister contemporary version of a feminist tradition in American literature that goes back, at least, to Dame Van Winkle and that percolates through popular fiction of the nineteenth century in the form of domestic tyranny" (26). To read this another way, Kesey's novel is a sinister contemporary version of a misogynistic tradition that goes back, at least, to Washington Irving and represent a recent example of what Nina Baym describes as "melodramas of beset manhood." In its post-World War II version, this belief that women are the root of all evil was articulated in the fear that mothers were gaining too much control over, and getting too much respect from, their sons in whom they were destroying the traditional masculine values of freedom and independence by keeping them weak and dependent.

Probably the most criticized and often-cited critique of "Momism" is Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* (1942).[3] Wylie argues that Mom, and son's loyalty to their Moms, is responsible for all that is wrong with American society:

> megaloid momworship has got completely out of hand. Our land,

> subjectively mapped, would have more silver cords and apron strings crisscrossing it than railroads and telephone wires. Mom is everywhere and everything and damned near everybody, and from her depends all the rest of the U.S. (185)

Echoing the tradition of blaming Mom for the feminization of men and society, Wylie sees women, and mothers in particular, as destroying the masculine desire for freedom and exploration and replacing it with a masculinity weakened by bureaucracy and social responsibility:

> Mom had already shaken out of him that notion of being a surveyor in the Andes which had bloomed in him when he was nine years old, so there was nothing left to do, anyway, but take a stockroom job in the hair pin factory and try to work up to vice-presidency. Thus the women of America raped the men, not sexually, unfortunately, but morally, since neuters come hard by morals. (188)

Wylie, who tries to provide an historical origin to Mom's destructive power in contemporary society, argues that all the problems began when mom left the kitchen and stepped into the world of politics: "Mom's first gracious presence at the ballot-box was roughly concomitant with a start toward a new all-time low in political scurviness, hoodlumism, gangsterism, labor strife, monopolistic thuggery, moral degeneration, civic corruption, smuggling, bribery, theft, murder, homosexuality, drunkeness, financial depression, chaos and war" (188-9). Wylie, a journalist, novelist, Hollywood script writer, and federal bureaucrat, describes his book as "a sermon" (xii), and given its extreme views and simple explanations of complex issues, it becomes easy to dismiss it as the work of a raving misogynist, but his book shares many ideas and assumptions with the psychological literature which explored issues surrounding the socialization of American males.

More subtle and influential than Wylie's book was the work of Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons, whose structural-functional school of sociology shared some of Wylie's ideas about the role mothers played in the socialization of sons, and particularly in regard to "hoodlumism," "gangsterism," and "moral degeneration." Parsons believed that the

effective socialization of children relies on a solid nuclear family in which parents each have a role and thus act as role models for their children:

> To be the main "breadwinner" of his family is the role of the normal adult male in our society. The corollary of this role is his far smaller participation than that of his wife in the internal affairs of the household. Consequently, housekeeping and the care of the children are still the primary function content of the adult feminine role in the "utilitarian" division of labor. (Parsons 191)

Though Parsons is supposedly discussing the American family with the objectivity of the social scientist--he describes the division of labor as "utilitarian"--his description of these roles as "normal" immediately establishes a judgment upon those who do not fit this model. Like Wylie, Parsons relies on the assumption that established gender roles result from natural utility, an idea challenged by contemporary theorists of gender who argue that gender roles are socially constructed and performed, and are not psychologically or biologically predetermined.

Discussing the problem of juvenile delinquency, Parsons provides a far more complex explanation than Wylie, yet they seem to share the assumption that ineffective role models--fathers who are not assertive and mothers who are too dominant, in both cases parents who do not fulfill their proper sex-role--are harmful to children, and thus to society. Parsons explains that adolescence for boys "is greatly complicated by the tendency to feminine identification inherent in the especially intense relation to the mother and the remoteness of the father" (344-5) and that boys react with "a kind of 'compulsive masculinity'":

> They get interested in athletics and physical prowess, in things in which men have the most primitive and obvious action over women. Furthermore they become allergic to all expression of tender emotion; they must be "tough." This universal pattern bears all the earmarks of a "reaction formation." It is so conspicuous, not because it is simply "masculine nature" but because it is a defense against a feminine identification. The commonness with which "mother fixation" is involved in all types of

> neurotic and psychotic disorders of Western men strongly confirms this. (305)

Parsons was one of many sociologists and psychologists who contributed to what psychologist Joseph H. Pleck, in his ground-breaking book *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981),[6] describes as

> the male sex role identity (MSRI) paradigm, a set of ideas about sex roles, especially the male role, that has dominated the academic social sciences since the 1930s and more generally has shaped our culture's view of the male role. In essence, the paradigm represents the way our society has constructed a psychology of masculinity. (1)

Pleck argues that "the MSRI paradigm heretofore has not received adequate critical attention; it has not been clearly identified as a general theoretical perspective, nor have its component parts been subjected to rigorous analysis" (1). Exploring assumptions about masculinity which he feels most people have come to accept unquestioningly, Pleck summarizes the vast social science literature which comprises the MSRI paradigm in eleven propositions in order to explore the paradigm's underlying belief that sex roles are naturally occurring. Proceeding with the very different belief that gender identity is socially constructed, rather than psychologically or biologically determined--"the distinctive feature of the MSRI paradigm is its view that sex roles develop from within, rather than being arbitrarily imposed from without: [...] the individual is preprogrammed to learn a traditional sex role as part of normal psychological development" (4)--Pleck reveals how gender stereotypes have contributed to a psychology which tends to blame dominant mothers and weak fathers for every social problem faced by adolescent males: homosexuality, delinquency, spousal abuse, hypermasculinity, and bad grades, among others. I will rely on Pleck's analysis of the MSRI paradigm in establishing a context for Kesey's portrayal of his characters, all of whom seem to suffer from some failure to effectively live up to expectations of their male sex role, a failure explained by the psychological theories which Pleck summarizes. I will also argue that Kesey's hero McMurphy, while explicitly portrayed as a traditional model of American heroism, also exemplifies a man who fits perfectly into the MSRI paradigm's definition a healthy male.[7]

The MSRI paradigm, with its assumptions about the importance of maintaining traditional sex roles and the danger to young men of dominant mothers and weak fathers, had a strong influence on the popular psychology of fifties culture, and can be seen clearly in Nicholas Ray's classic film about teenage alienation and rebellion, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956). The film explores the anxious adolescence of three middle-class main characters, Judy (Natalie Wood), Plato (Sal Minneo) and Jim (James Dean), but the story really centers on Jim, who sees his problems as stemming from his overly critical, domineering mother and his weak father, a man unwilling to stand up to Jim's mother and thus be an effective model of masculinity for his son. Jim's mother is portrayed as neurotic--Jim says to her at one point "every time you can't face yourself you blame it on me"--for she is unwilling to play the role of nurturer to her son and sympathetic supporter to her husband, whom she instead criticizes. Jim tells Ray, the sympathetic juvenile division police officer, how his mother "eats him [Jim's father] alive and he takes it" and says of his father "I don't ever want to be like him." Jim believes that if his father "had the guts to knock mom cold once, then maybe she'd be happy and then she'd stop picking on him," suggesting that mom wants a real man to put her in her place, a place where she would be truly content for it is her role to be subservient according to the sex-role theory espoused by Parsons and others.

Despite Jim's frustration with his father, we feel some sympathy for dad because we quickly realize that Jim's father himself has been the victim of a domineering mother, whom we see criticizing her son at the jail where they find Jim, and at breakfast the next morning. It is unclear whether she lives with Jim and his parents, for we do not see her again; she is used simply to show how this pattern of men being weakened by their mothers is perpetuated through the generations. The clearest example of dad's feminization comes when Jim mistakes his father for his mother because his father is wearing an apron and is cleaning up a mess he made for fear his wife will see it. Jim exclaims "let her see it" and tears off the apron, but in the next scene the apron is on again, and dad is unable to give Jim advice about honour and courage, instead suggesting Jim should make lists and think, rather than act, a solution which gives no aid or comfort to a frustrated Jim. Jim is at an age when he needs a strong father figure, but Jim's father

is not strong enough to stand up for himself to his wife, so he has little chance to stand up for and guide his confused and frustrated son.

While Jim is clearly alienated and confused, his friend Plato is far more psychologically troubled. Plato seems to exist as a vehicle to show Jim's courage and loyalty, and to show the audience, and Jim's parents, the "psychotic disorders" which can result from a son not having a father to act as an effective male role-model or a mother to give him love and nurturing. Plato is portrayed as overly sensitive and effeminate and his attachment to Jim seems unnatural. He says to Jim "if only you could be my dad," and again feels abandoned when he is left by Judy and Jim, an act which triggers the chase of an armed Plato back to the planetarium. When Jim gives Plato his jacket, Plato caresses it lovingly, suggesting that Plato wants something more than Jim can give. Plato's alienation, effeminacy, and suggested homosexuality are clearly the result of his absent father and selfish mother, and are a more severe version of the confusion Jim suffers from due to his present, but ineffectual, mother and father.

And this lesson is not lost on Jim's father, who is present when Plato is shot. Plato is of course wearing Jim's jacket, and it is the idea of seeing his son killed that finally sparks Jim's father to be the man his son needs him to be. Embracing his son while his mother stands apart, Jim's father promises "I'll try to be as strong as you want me to be," a promise he keeps immediately. Jim's mother starts to speak as Jim gets into the car with Judy, but Jim's father stops her, and they embrace. Jim's prediction has come true, though without the physical violence, for mom's silence suggests that she has been waiting for her husband to be more assertive. Jim has found a girl to love, has helped his father find his masculinity, and as is suggested by his parents' silent embrace, also helped his mother find her role as loving supporter of husband and son.

Like *Rebel Without a Cause*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* argues that the problems with contemporary society stem from dominant mothers and weak or absent fathers. Billy Bibbitt is the perfect example of the victim of Momism, for his mother--no father is ever mentioned--is portrayed as a neurotic whose denial of her age has resulted in her denying Billy his maturity and masculinity. She refuses to see herself as anything but a young woman, and thus must continue to see Billy as a child:

> "Sweetheart, you still have scads of time for things like that [marriage and college]. Your whole life is ahead of you."
>
> "Mother, I'm th-th-thirty-one years old!"
>
> She laughed and twiddled his ear with the weed. "Sweetheart, do I look like the mother of a middle-aged man?" (281)

Kesey portrays Billy as a boy/man unable to take charge of his life because he fears his independence will hurt his mother, and thus her neuroses have become the source of his neuroses. Nurse Ratched has learned to use Billy's fear of hurting his mother to keep Billy weak and passive, and Kesey suggests that Billyss suicide results from Nurse Ratched exploiting this fear. Realizing that Billy has finally asserted himself and shown his manhood by having sex with Candy, Nurse Ratched regains control by wondering "'how your poor mother is going to take this'": "'This is going to disturb her terribly. You know how she is when she gets disturbed, Billy; you know how ill the poor woman can become. She's very sensitive, especially concerning her son'" (301). Though Billy acts upon his desires when drunk and encouraged by McMurphy, Nurse Ratched knows that deep down Billy is still under the power of his guilt-inducing mother.

Kesey's primary example of the dominant mother is Nurse Ratched, main representative of the evil Combine, whom Kesey portrays as another son-destroying mother, a woman who denies her role as nurturer--Kesey gives her large maternal breasts which she attempts to hide--and thus represents the problems resulting from women who refuse their rightful sex-role. "Our sweet, smiling, tender angel of mercy, Mother Ratched" (58) has never married, and has no children of her own--Kesey suggests she is asexual, her perverted morality fighting against her womanly physiognomy--and is only interested in controlling men, not in loving or submitting to them. Philip Wylie believed that

> Mom is organization-minded. Organizations, she has happily discovered, are intimidating to all men, not just mere men. They frighten politicians to sniveling servility and they terrify pastors; they bother bank presidents and they pulverize school boards. Mom has many such organizations, the real purpose of which is to compel an abject compliance of her environs to her

personal desires. (190)

Kesey clearly shares Wylie's belief, for he portrays Nurse Ratched as determined to keep her ward, its patients, and herself, well organized. She shows no warmth or compassion, but is portrayed as an automaton, a robotic "ball-cutter" whose "face is smooth, calculated, precision-made, like an expensive baby doll" (5). The conflict between Nurse Ratched and McMurphy is about control versus freedom: she argues that all her decisions are therapeutic and thus for the men's good, while he believes that she simply wants control for its own sake, and wants to keep the men weak and dependent, a mother unwilling to let her adopted sons be men.

Of course, not all women in Kesey's novel are castrating mothers: there are those at the other end of the spectrum, the passive women who provide sex and support in order to help maintain men's proper role as seeker of freedom and sex. Speaking of his mother, Wylie explains that she "felt much as I do about the thundering third sex, as do all good women, of whom there are still a few" (192), and Kesey too has a few "good" women who help identify the problems inherent in domineering women like Nurse Ratched. The Japanese nurse, "about as big as the small end of nothing whittled to a fine point, as McMurphy put it later" (265), represents what Kesey believes is a positive model of femininity. She is associated with geishas and female subservience in traditional Japanese culture, and it is she who identifies what is wrong with Nurse Ratched: "Army Nurses trying to run an army hospital. They are a little sick themselves. I sometimes think all single nurses should be fired after they reach thirty-five" (266). Candy and Sandy also represent Kesey's feminine ideal, for they provide sex but ask for little, in McMurphy's case not even money, in return, for they are out for a good time. Explaining, as well as reinforcing, Kesey's misogynist binary, Richard D. Maxwell argues that Candy "is like a breath of fresh air when she enters the ward. She is all woman, knows it and enjoys it. She is proud of her womanhood and likes nothing better than to feel men's eyes upon her. She is the perfect contrast to Big Nurse" (142). Articulating ideas about sex and free-love that would become popular later in the decade, Kesey is suggesting that Big Nurse's problems stem from her denial of her sexuality and a refusal to allow others to pursue freedom, sexual or otherwise. She may believe she is creating order and health, but

interpreted through what Robert Boyers calls Kesey's "porno-politics"--Kesey's belief that what will cure society are "the twin resources of laughter and uninhibited sexuality" (435)--Nurse Ratched is simply denying healthy sexuality, her denial making her a cold and controlling robot and her sons unable to grow up to be real men.

If women such as Nurse Ratched and Mrs. Bibbitt are the evil mothers in Kesey explanation of what is wrong with American society, the men they try to control are the victims of this "matriarchy." We learn, to McMurphy's amazement and to ours, that "there are only a few men on the ward that *are* committed" (183); most of the men are there voluntarily because they are unable to face the responsibilities and expectations of the world outside. Again, Kesey seems to borrow from Wylie, who describes mom as "a middle-aged puffin with an eye like a hawk that has just seen a rabbit twitch far below" (189). Harding uses this same image to describe the self-perception of the inmates who have voluntarily returned to mother because they are unable to grow up and face the real world:

> "All of us in here are rabbits of varying ages and degrees, hippity-hopping through our Walt Disney world. Oh, don't misunderstand me, we're not in here because we are rabbits--we'd be rabbits wherever we were--we're all in here because we can't *adjust* to our rabbithood. We *need* a good strong wolf like the nurse to teach us our place." (62)

In Kesey's vision of contemporary society, most men have internalized the idea that they are to be tame and accept their place as dutiful father and husband, worker and citizen, and the asylum is for those who recognize they have not internalized this role, and will only be happy when they finally can accept it and follow mom's wish that they be a good boy. As Wylie puts it, "Our society is too much an institution built to appease the rapacity of loving mothers" (203).

Randle Patrick McMurphy is not a rabbit, but is the hero of the novel whom Kesey portrays as a model of traditional masculinity, the man who has not been trapped by contemporary society and its emasculating values. Wondering how McMurphy has escaped the Combine, Chief Bromden decides that it is because McMurphy has remained free from society's expectations and responsibilities: "No wife wanting new linoleum. No

relatives pulling at him with watery old eyes. No one to care about, which is what makes him free enough to be a good con man" (89). McMurphy represents Kesey's nostalgic vision of true American masculinity: a man who seeks freedom and acts by his own rules, "the logger [...], the swaggering gambler, the big redheaded brawling Irishman, the cowboy out of the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare" (189).

The Combine labels McMurphy a psychopath because his behaviour antagonizes society, which wants men to be weak and subservient, but Kesey clearly believes that McMurphy's position as "psychopath," as a man who has escaped the power of the Combine, gives him both insight into how the Combine works and the belief that he can challenge it and save the other men in the ward by restoring their manhood. Responding to Harding's explanation that Nurse Ratched is trying to help the men, McMurphy states "She fooled me with that kindly little old mother bit for maybe three minutes when I came in this morning," but now he has recognized her for what she truly is: "a ball-cutter" (58). Kesey suggests that despite the seeming variety of psychological problems the men in the ward are suffering, according to "the work of Freud, Jung, and Maxwell Jones" (56), what they are really suffering from is a lack of old-fashioned masculinity, as represented by Kesey's hero, McMurphy. For Harding and Chief Bromden, McMurphy represents the strong father-figure and masculine role-model that they need to confront the domineering mother, Big Nurse, and thus cure them of being rabbits by helping them restore their weakened masculinity.

"Curing" Harding's Sexuality

Late in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Harding tries to explain to McMurphy the reason he is a rabbit, voluntarily submitting himself to the humiliating experience of group therapy, or what McMurphy has called "a peckin' party" (55):

> "Guilt. Shame. Fear. Self-belittlement. I discovered at an early age that I was--shall we be kind and say different? It's a better, more general word than that other one. I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn't the practices, I don't think, it was the feeling that the great pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me--

> and the great voice of millions chanting, 'Shame. Shame. Shame.' It's society's way of dealing with someone different." (294)

McMurphy responds by stating "I'm different," so he cannot understand why Harding has become a rabbit and he has not, for as he explains, "I've had people bugging me about one thing or another as far back as I can remember but that's not what--but it didn't drive me crazy" (294). Kesey somewhat naively compares McMurphy's and Harding's "difference," though in reality Kesey's narrative will show that only one of these characters needs to be cured. McMurphy does not feel shame for his actions and lifestyle; rather, it is a lifestyle he fights to maintain, and which other men long to live, as Kesey demonstrates by portraying McMurphy as the model of masculinity to which men should aspire.

Harding and McMurphy are very different men, and represent very models of masculinity in the novel. Harding is "the bull goose loony here" (18) when McMurphy arrives, and he maintains this position because he believes his intelligence and education make him superior to the other patients. As Chief Bromden explains, Harding is "president of the Patients' Council on account of he has a paper that says he graduated from college" (19); Harding relies on his education to compensate for his physical weakness and somewhat effeminate appearance:

> Harding is a flat, nervous man with a face that sometimes makes you think you seen him in the movies, like it's a face too pretty to just be a guy on the street. He's got wide, thin shoulders and he curves them in around his chest when he is trying to hide inside himself. He's got hands so long and white and dainty I think they carved each other out of soap, and sometimes they get loose and glide around in front of him free as two white birds until he notices them and traps them between his knees; it bothers him that he's got pretty hands. (18-9)

In the traditional gender binary, McMurphy is strong and masculine because he acts, while Harding is weak and feminine because he talks. Traditionally, "A real man is supposed to be a doer, a man of action," explains critic Peter Schwenger, and thus "a man who speaks much is suspect; and he is hardly less suspect if he happens to speak well" (18). Harding

can articulate reasons for his being a rabbit, and may understand the psychological theories which explain his homosexuality, but he cannot overcome his feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy, and cannot stand up for himself, and act as he wants to, the way McMurphy does.

Hardings insecure sexual identity is revealed through his attempts to compensate for his effeminacy by trying to be hypermasculine, a clear example according to the MSRI paradigm that he is failing to fit his proper sex role. Chief Bromden explains how Harding's discomfort with his hands led him to compensate by acting as he feels society wants him to act: "Harding had hands that looked like they should have done paintings, though they never did; Harding trapped his hands and forced them to work sawing planks for doghouses" (153). Kesey contrasts Harding discomfort with his body and sexuality, and his attempts to prove his masculinity, with McMurphy's seeming comfort with his male identity. Though strong and tough, McMurphy is also sensitive and enjoys "painting a picture at OT with real paints on a blank paper" or "writing letters to someone in a beautiful flowing hand" (153). Unlike Harding, McMurphy "hadn't let what he looked like run his life one way or the other, any more than he'd let the Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to fit" (153). The Combine may label McMurphy as a "psychopath," but their idea of correct masculinity is clearly defined by weakness, guilt and dependence, according to Kesey. Though Nurse Ratched would disagree, McMurphy represents a man perfectly adjusted to his sex role, according to the MSRI paradigm, because he is strong without needing to prove his strength, and is sensitive without fearing to show his sensitivity.

If submitting to Nurse Ratched and her use of the "peckin' party" is how Harding reinforces his shame and guilt over his sexuality within the asylum, it is his choice of wife which reminds Harding of his inadequacy as a man when he is in society. Though some critics have argued that Mrs. Harding provides just another example of how women try to dominate and weaken men,[7] I believe she represents an external manifestation of Harding's shame. Harding recognizes that he is "different" in preferring men to women, but unable to accept this fact, Harding tries to overcompensate by marrying a woman to whom he can feel intellectually superior, and who can suggest Harding's sexual prowess because she

herself is portrayed as physically well-endowed. But rather than suggesting Harding's virility, Vera has become a reminder of his effeminacy, thus externalizing the humiliation and guilt he feels over his masculine failings. Vera asks Dale in front of the other men, "when are you going to learn to laugh instead of making that mousy little squeak," (172) and when Harding is unable to provide his wife a cigarette, she complains "Oh Dale, you never do have enough, do you," (173) shortcomings which Kesey directly contrasts with McMurphy's big laugh and large cache of cigarettes and sexual energy.

McMurphy may believe himself to be different, but as I have suggested, his is not a difference which he feels he needs to cure, while Harding feels he needs to cure himself if he is to stop being a rabbit and start being a man. Although McMurphy and the other men never try to make Harding feel guilty about his sexuality, Kesey nevertheless portrays Harding's effeminacy and homosexuality as problems which Harding must overcome, and which can only be overcome by embracing the healthy, aggressive masculinity embodied by McMurphy. Harding explains to McMurphy that he does not want to sneak out, but wants Nurse Ratched and others to know he is ready to leave, "right out that front door, with all the traditional redtape and complications. I want my wife to be here in a car at a certain time to pick me up. I want them to know I was able to do it that way" (293). With McMurphy as his role-model, Harding learns to replace his reliance on big words and education with the tough, direct language of the stoic cowboy hero, shown clearly when he stands up to Nurse Ratched and says, "Lady, I think you're full of so much bullshit" (307). Kesey does not suggest that Harding has learned to accept his sexuality without guilt and shame, leaving his wife to live an openly gay life; rather, he suggests that with the help of a strong father-figure, McMurphy, Harding has stood up to the castrating mother and overcome his feelings of sexual confusion. Harding does leave through the front door, his wife picking him up, which suggests that Harding has recovered his "wham-bam," cured of his troubling sexuality, Harding can finally be the type of man that will keep his wife from needing to look elsewhere, a man of strong actions and few words.

Chief Bromden's Cowboy Step-Father

Kesey never reveals Harding's family history, or the reasons for his homosexuality, but we

can guess based on popular theories of the time that like Plato in *Rebel Without a Cause* or Tom Lee in the film *Tea and Sympathy*[8], Harding's "difference" is the result of ineffective parental role-models. In contrast, we learn a great deal about Chief Bromden's parents as McMurphy helps Chief Bromden retrieve his past--a past he has locked away while hiding for years in the fog--as part of helping Chief Bromden regain his sense of identity and masculinity. Even more than for Harding, McMurphy plays the role of father-figure and male role-model for Chief Bromden, who from the beginning of the novel makes associations between McMurphy and Papa, thinking when he first sees McMurphy how "He talks a little the way Papa used to, voice loud and full of hell" (11), and later thinking how his father used to challenge the Combine and make the "Government men" (91) look foolish the same way McMurphy challenges Nurse Ratched.

But Kesey suggests that Papa was finally an ineffective role model for his son, for Papa could not stand up to the Combine, represented by another domineering woman: Papa's white wife. Chief Bromden explains to McMurphy that "'Papa was a full Chief and his name was Tee Ah Millatoona. That means The-Pine-That-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain, and we didn't live on a mountain. He was real big when I was a kid. My mother got twice his size.'" (207). Papa begins to lose his identity when he marries a white "woman from town. Her name is Bromden. He took her name, not she his" (202). The government exploits this fact, for Mrs. Bromden helps to convince Papa and the tribe to accept the hydroelectric dam, a deal which further destroys Papa's identity as Chief of a tribe that maintains its existence by maintaining its land and traditional practices of hunting and fishing. Chief Bromden explains how the Combine, with his mother's help, destroyed his father by destroying his father's culture:

> "It worked on him for years. He was big enough to fight it for a while. It wanted us to live in inspected houses. It wanted to take the falls. It was even in the tribe, and they worked on him. In the town they beat him up in the alleys and cut his hair short once. Oh, the Combine's big--big. He fought it a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up." (208)

Unable to maintain his personal or cultural identity, Papa escapes into alcohol, and it is as

a defeated drunk that Chief Bromden remembers his father: "'the last time I see him he's blind in the cedars from drinking and every time I see him put the bottle to his mouth he don't suck out of it, it sucks out of him until he's shrunk so wrinkled and yellow even the dogs don't know him, and we had to cart him out of the cedars, in a pickup, to a place in Portland, to die'" (209).

The family history that Chief Bromden provides shows a father weakened and beaten down by his wife, making Chief Bromden another example of the theory that weak fathers and dominant mothers make for maladjusted sons. Papa's destruction by his wife and the Combine has "shrunk" his son, making him afraid of things that once gave him pleasure in showing his courage:

> I used to be real brave around the water when I was a kid on the Columbia; I'd walk the scaffolding around the falls with all the other men, scrambling around with the water roaring and white all around me and the mist making rainbows, without even any hobnails like the men wore. But when I saw my Papa start getting scared of things, I got scared too, got so as I couldn't even stand in a shallow pool. (160)

Chief Bromden has learned from his father that one must hide from the Combine because it cannot be defeated. Chief Bromden pretends he is deaf and dumb, believing that "If my being half Indian ever helped me in any way in this dirty life, it helped me being cagey, helped me all these years" (3), and just as Papa used alcohol to escape by obliterating memory and reality, Chief Bromden uses the fog to hide when he feels threatened: "Nobody complains about all the fog. I know why, now: as bad as it is, you can slip back in it and feel safe" (123). But as in the case of his father, Chief Bromden's "cageyness" has come at the price of his identity. He wonders, after seeing McMurphy, a man that is "not gonna let them twist him and manufacture him," "how it was possible that anybody could manage such an enormous thing as being what he was" (153). Papa could not do this, so Chief Bromden learned that it was necessary to perform "dumb Indian" in order to escape being beaten down as Papa was.

McMurphy represents a father-figure and model of masculinity who helps Chief Bromden regain his strength and size, which symbolically represent his identity and his

awareness of the past and hope for the future. When McMurphy shakes Chief Bromden's hand when they first meet, Chief Bromden explains how "my hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up out there on my stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power" (24). As I have suggested, McMurphy is a man unlike any Chief Bromden has encountered, a man who does not hide by performing the identity the Combine tries to give him, for he has remained unchanged by the Combine. As Chief Bromden explains, "That's what McMurphy can't understand, us wanting to be safe. He keeps trying to drag us out of the fog, out into the open where we'd be easy to get at" (123). McMurphy puts Chief Bromden on his "special body-buildin' course" (211), but of course it is really Chief Bromden's confidence and masculinity that he is restoring, promising the Chief "you'll have women trippin' you and beatin' you to the floor" (212).

The fishing trip, a mainstay of father/son bonding, helps the confidence of all the men involved. After the men catch their fish and return to the dock, Chief Bromden recognizes that "these weren't the same bunch of weak-knees from a nuthouse that they'd [the men on the docks] watched take their insults on the docks this morning" (242). Through acts of rebellion like the fishing trip, Chief Bromden learns to replace what his father taught through his defeat with what McMurphy teaches through his continuing desire to fight and win. Chief Bromden explains how "I was getting so's I could see some good in the life around me. McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I'd remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kid's poetry to me" (243). And the party that McMurphy organizes on the ward helps further convince Chief Bromden that one does not have to fear the Combine, as his father did, for it can be fought in small ways, even if it cannot be defeated completely:

> Drunk and running and laughing and carrying on with women square in the center of the Combine's most powerful stronghold! I thought back on the night, on what we'd been doing, and it was near impossible to believe. I had to keep reminding myself that it had truly happened, that we had made it happen. We had just unlocked a window and let it in like you let in fresh air. Maybe the Combine wasn't all-powerful. What was to stop us from

> doing it again, now that we saw we could? Or keep us from doing other things we wanted? (292)

McMurphy has replaced Papa as the figure whose example influences Chief Bromden's self-perception, his masculinity, and his perception of the Combine. He has taught Chief Bromden not to fear the Combine and hide in silence, but to be himself by being what Kesey argues is a real man. McMurphy's desire to live the ideal of traditional masculinity--ironically, a masculinity commonly associated with the cowboy and the frontiersman--helps teach Chief Bromden how to be a "natural" man. A new version of the "Great White Father," McMurphy helps free Chief Bromden by helping him rediscover his masculinity and reconnect with his personal history and cultural heritage.

After a long battle with Nurse Ratched, McMurphy is finally destroyed by the Combine, but even in McMurphy's death Kesey shows him to be a better man than Papa, and thus a better father-figure and role-model for Chief Bromden. Kesey goes out of his way to present McMurphy's destruction by the Combine as a sacrifice, symbolically portraying McMurphy as a Christ-figure whose actions result in his lobotomy, but which also destroy Nurse Ratched's power and help Harding and Chief Bromden, among others, escape the Combine. In contrast, Papa simply drank himself to death, a death that was also a defeat that scarred his son psychologically until he was restored to full size by McMurphy. Faced with a lobotomized McMurphy, Chief Bromden decides that McMurphy "wouldn't have left something like that sit there in the day room with his name tacked on it for twenty of thirty years so the Big Nurse could use it as an example of what can happen if you buck the system" (308). Chief Bromden saw Papa become a symbol of the Combine's defeat of him and his culture, the "drunken Indian" that the government could use to reinforce stereotypical perceptions about "the Vanishing American." This is the image of Papa that has haunted Chief Bromden, so he decides that he would rather remember McMurphy as a self-sacrificing hero and not as a victim. Chief Bromden kills McMurphy so he does not become like Papa, but instead can become a mythic figure symbolizing the power of the individual to challenge, and in small ways defeat, the Combine.

Fighting Words: Chief Bromden's Voice

The fear and desire to hide from the Combine which Chief Bromden learned from his father has kept him unwilling to speak and unable to remember, except in fragments, the personal history which comprises his personal identity and cultural history. As Chief Bromden explains at the beginning of his narrative, as he tries "to think back and remember things about the village and the big Columbia River, think about ah one time Papa and me were hunting birds," he cannot find comfort in the past because of his present fears: "like always when I try to place my thoughts in the past and hide there, the fear close at hand seeps in through the memory" (6). But with McMurphy's help, Chief Bromden overcomes his fear of the Combine, a change associated with his regaining his past and his voice.

Losing his fear of the Combine, and thus spending less time in the fog, Chief Bromden begins to remember things about his past; remembering how the government used his mother against Papa to help buy the land for the hydroelectric dam, he explains, "I was kind of amazed I'd remembered that. It was the first time in what seemed to be centuries that I'd been able to remember much about my childhood. It fascinated me to discover I could still do it" (203). Immediately after this discovery Chief Bromden speaks to McMurphy, telling him about the Combine and about how it, with the help of his mother, had destroyed Papa, and warning him that the Combine will try to destroy McMurphy the same way. McMurphy thus helps Chief Bromden regain his past and also his present, from which he no longer tries to hide: "It's fogging up a little, but I won't slip off and hide in it. No ... never again ..." (275).

Chief Bromden explains near the beginning of his narrative that

> It's gonna burn me just that way ["fear burning down into him like steam"], finally telling about all this, about the hospital, and her, and the guys--and about McMurphy. I been silent so long it's gonna roar out of me like floodwaters and you think the guy telling this is ranting and raving my God; you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth! But, please. It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen. (7-8)

Chief Bromden tells his story in retrospect, and despite his fear of the pain it will cause and the doubts about his sanity it will raise, Chief Bromden refuses to remain silent because the narrative is an act of self-assertion. Explaining his acting deaf and dumb, Chief Bromden remembers how "it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all" (198) and that when he spoke, he could "see the apparatus inside them take the words I just said and try to fit the words in here and there, this place and that, and when they find the words don't have any place ready-made where they'll fit, the machinery disposes of the words like they weren't even spoken" (201). Kesey suggests that for Chief Bromden, telling what happened means using his voice and memory to challenge the Combine, and thus his narrative is both a tribute to McMurphy, for he is the hero of the story, and a means of communicating the ideals of masculinity and personal freedom which McMurphy represents. Chief Bromden keeps McMurphy alive, and remains able to fight the Combine, because with McMurphy's help, Chief Bromden has fought through his fear and silence to help make McMurphy a hero.

Chief Bromden's narration is an offering of thanks to McMurphy, the father-figure who helped restore Chief Bromden's sanity and identity, but is also an act of homosocial mediation, for Chief Bromden can only show his love and gratitude in McMurphy's absence. Several times in the novel Chief Bromden tries to establish intimacy with McMurphy through words, but each time he is interrupted. After McMurphy realizes he is committed, and thus his length of sentence is determined by Nurse Ratched, he briefly loses his bravado and becomes "cagey," an act which Chief Bromden wants to tell him is wise, rather than cowardly: "I dropped back till I was walking beside McMurphy and I wanted to tell him not to fret about it, that nothing could be done [...] and I was just about to come out and say it when he raised his head and shoved his hat back and speeded up to where the least black boy was walking" (185-6). After their shock therapy, Chief Bromden says how "I had a lot of things I wanted to say to him before I went, but he'd just come back from a treatment and was sitting following the ping-pong ball with his eyes like he was wired to it" (277).

When Chief Bromden finally speaks to McMurphy, he has to find something to say

other than the feelings he truly wants to express: "I thought for a minute for something to say to him, but the only thing that came to my mind was the kind of thing one man can't say to another because it sounds wrong in words" (206). So later when he thinks McMurphy is asleep, Chief Bromden tries to establish physical contact, reaching over "to touch him because he is who he is," but this attempt at intimacy is also interrupted and transformed into a more traditional form of male bonding: "But as I was about to reach over to that arm he said, 'Say, Chief,' and rolled in bed with a lurch of covers, facing me, 'Say, Chief, why don't you come on this fishin' trip with us tomorrow?'" (210) Unable to find words to communicate his feelings in person, Chief Bromden instead shows his love and respect for McMurphy in traditional war-movie terms: seeing McMurphy wounded beyond saving, Chief Bromden puts him out of his misery and out of the control of Nurse Ratched and the Combine, thus making room for the McMurphy legend Chief Bromden creates and helps keep alive through his act of narration.

Escaping the institution and overcoming his fear and silence to tell his, and McMurphy's, story show that Chief Bromden has learned to fight the Combine and to recognize that it is not all powerful, but Chief Bromden also recognizes that the Combine cannot be easily defeated. Kesey equates fighting the Combine with men fighting to retain their sense of masculinity. It is a common belief that manhood is not something one ever achieves, but is instead something one is always striving to attain and thus prove. As Kesey makes clear through his imagery of the Combine, society is continually fighting to steal men's masculinity, so men have to fight to retain their identity as men, something which only McMurphy seems able to do, his defeat portrayed by Kesey as a choice to help the other men on the ward. Early in his narrative, Chief Bromden explains that Nurse Ratched "don't lose on her losses, but she wins on ours. To beat her you don't have to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. As soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose once, she's won for good. And eventually we all lose. Nobody can help that" (109).

By the end of his narrative, Chief Bromden begins to believe that even if one cannot defeat the Combine, there is value in simply trying to fight it, for working together against the Combine gives men a sense of purpose and connection to other men: "The

thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place" (303). Chief Bromden had wondered, "How can McMurphy be what he is?" and the answer, he realizes, is that McMurphy fights to retain his masculinity; he fights a society that tries to emasculate him by fitting him into a role defined by social responsibilities and expectations. Chief Bromden believes that McMurphy's secret was that he was not tied down by a family or a career, and this is what Chief Bromden feels he must do if he is to keep up his fight: keep moving. He wishes to return to his home, and the past, "to see if there's any of the guys I use'd to know back in the village who haven't drunk themselves goofy;" to see if the men of the tribe are fighting the Combine by "building their old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over that big million-dollar hydroelectric dam, and are spearing salmon in the spillway" (311). But no matter where Chief Bromden ends up, he will always remember the lessons he learned from McMurphy, his second father.

Notes

1. Calling Kesey an "Oregonian woodsman" is a little misleading, considering Kesey graduated from the University of Oregon and did graduate work in creative writing at Stanford University.

2. Discussing the nature of Kerouac's popularity, Bruce Cook explains that "if they [Kerouac's novels] are not assigned reading (many of them are), they are touted by seniors to freshman at colleges and universities all over the country" (248).

3. A popular manifestation of the MSRI paradigm was the M-F Test, a series of questions which was supposed to measure how well one fit the proper male sex role. For a discussion of the M-F Test, see Kimmel 1996, 206-10.

4. Porter defends Kesey against those who focus on issues of gender in the novel, yet he does not feel obligated to address the clearly racist portrayal of African American characters in the novel. Is Porter hiding behind the idea of symbolism and universal themes, or is he simply refusing to bring up an issue that other critics have largely ignored in their celebration of the novel?

5. Despite his treatment by other critics, I have chosen to discuss Wylie because several of the particular images and ideas he uses to portray Momism are present in Kesey's novel. I do not know whether Kesey read Wylie, but it seems a coincidence that their visions of society and its effect on men are so similar.

6. As Michael Kimmel explains, "Pleck is the first psychologist to reexamine the M-F Test [a central apparatus of the MSRI paradigm] and find it empirically untenable and internally contradictory" (1996, 453 n.41).

7. Kagan and Moss's 1962 book *From Birth to Maturity: A Study in Psychological Development* provides analyses of case studies about male development that clearly reflect contemporary assumptions about what was healthy, normal male behaviour and development. Kagan and Moss contrast "a well-built, attractive looking youngster, a real little boy" who "loves to play and exert himself but does not like to lose" with "a pale, bleached-out looking child" who "lacks compactness and sturdiness of muscle or body build," "an overly dressed boy, always very trim," who "does not participate at all on the playground with the other boys" (161-5). Nurse Ratched may believe McMurphy is a problem, but clearly we are intended to recognize that he is the epitome of the healthy, aggressive boy grown up.

8. Vincente Minnelli's *Tea and Sympathy* is a sympathetic portrayal of the plight of Tom Lee, an effeminate--homosexuality is never mentioned--college student, and while the film never condemns Tom, it still relies on the same assumptions to explain Tom's behaviour: Tom has been raised by a maid who taught him to cook and sew, and his father, a business man, has been absent and unable to provide Tom with a proper male role model with whom to identify. His inability to find the proper model of manhood is affirmed when the jocks from the school begin to read the questions from an M-F test they find in a magazine. Despite the film's sympathy for Tom, the film assures us that Tom has overcome his "problem" by first having Tom sleep with the College Dean's kind and understanding wife, and then by assuring us that Tom has fallen in love and married.

CHAPTER FIVE: Take Me Back to the Ball Game: Wounded Fathers and Anxious Sons in Field of Dreams

The financial and critical success of the film *Field of Dreams* attests to the wide-ranging appeal of its main character and the nostalgic ideals he embodies. One critic exclaims that "*Field of Dreams* soars beyond dreams" and describes the film as "a fantasy about belief, hope, fathers and sons, passion for life. A masterwork of wonderment," while another describes it as "a magical movie. It's so perfect, it's like a miracle--a completely original and visionary movie."[1] Wes D. Gehring argues that *Field of Dreams* is a "populist" film in the tradition of Frank Capra, for like populism the film celebrates "adherence to traditional values and customs (mirroring the phenomenon's [populism's] strong sense of nostalgia)" and a "general optimism concerning both man's potential for good and the importance of the individual" (36). And Caroline M. Cooper, citing an interview of Bill Clinton by Tom Brook, explains that *Field of Dreams* "is, after *High Noon* (1952), the favorite film of President Clinton. He loves it, apparently, because of its message that 'if you build it, they will come'; he finds it a 'fabulous fairy tale' which 'makes people feel that anything can happen'" (163). Marketed as "a glowing tribute to all who dare to dream" (according to the back of the video box), filmgoers and critics seem to embrace what they perceive is the film's universal message of the power of hope and dreams, an ideal which remains at the center of American cultural mythology.

But not all critics see the film as so endearing and benign. Critical of the emotions generated in audiences by the film, film historians Leonard Quart and Albert Auster suggest that *Field of Dreams* achieved popularity because it "provides a great many simplistic soliloquies about the need to dream and to recreate the innocence of childhood [...] but its alternative vision is apolitical and nebulous, consisting of little more than a set of greeting card platitudes" (172-3). Rather than accepting *Field of Dreams* as an expression of timeless American values, and as "a glowing tribute to all who dare to dream," Quart and Auster, as well as other critics, have situated the film historically and ideologically within the tradition of "Reaganite entertainment." Most discussions about eighties films and their identification with the ideological program of Ronald Reagan are

indebted to Andrew Britton, whose seminal article, "Blissing Out: The Politics of Reaganite Entertainment" (1988), provided a definition of "Reaganite entertainment" and identified its features and their ideological implications: right-wing utopianism, escapism, a wish to rewrite history, a focus on fathers and patriarchy, and magical solutions to historical and political dilemmas. Thus the very aspects of the film--hope, idealism, nostalgia--which viewers like Bill Clinton, and critics like Bobby Fong, praise--"The magic at the heart of the novel, the film and the Iowa field is a pastoral vision compounded of yearning and faith. Baseball, the farm, and Eden itself represent both a yearning for an idealized Golden Age and an assertion that what is yearned for can still be" (Fong 31)--are those which Vivecca Gretton and others criticize: the film's insistence "on the recreation of a mythical past, on the (re)writing of history, and on reinstating the position of the Father" (Gretton 70-1). According to Quart and Auster, Gretton, and other critics influenced by Britton, one finds in the warm feelings created by *Field of Dreams* a desire to return, via baseball and the nostalgia that it evokes, to a simpler, more conservative time, a desire which reflects the conservative agenda espoused by Reagan and communicated in the majority of eighties Hollywood films.[2]

While I agree with those who read *Field of Dreams* as reflecting historically particular social and political concerns, and believe its seemingly apolitical message is in fact representative of a conservative ideology, my reading of this film will focus on situating it within a narrower historical context. Although Britton and those critics influenced by his reading of "Reaganite entertainment" provide a valuable framework for understanding the political nature of *Field of Dreams*, I find their reading of this and other films is too broad, and relies on generalizations which do not capture the complexity of the film or the historical period in question. While I too will focus on issues of nostalgia, fathers and sons, and the seemingly apolitical solutions *Field of Dreams* provides to solve historically particular problems--all of which are features which Britton identifies in his article--I will focus on two particular but related historical phenomena of the eighties: the growing perception of a "crisis in masculinity" which spawned the Men's Movement of the late eighties, and the transformation of sixties teen sons into the disillusioned and conservative fathers of the eighties.

Field of Dreams portrays one man's mid-life crisis, a crisis defined by a disillusionment with the sixties, an idealistic time that managed only to alienate Ray Kinsella from his father. Searching for something to replace the misdirected ideals of his youth, Ray discovers baseball, and through it he reconnects with his father and discovers an empowering model of masculinity which he believes transcends time, place, and ideological contradictions. Ray's quest will teach him the importance of sacrifice and of accepting his responsibilities as father and husband, thus helping him overcome his fear of middle-age. And while I accept that the issues the film explores are genuine--anxieties about men's identity and middle-aged men facing questions concerning their former ideals and present responsibilities--I find the magical means by which these issues are resolved to be problematic. The film addresses historically particular anxieties faced by men like Ray, the straight, white, middle-aged, middle-class men who comprise most of the Men's Movement, but the ending of the film shows a refusal to address the historical and ideological complexities of both the issues the film raises and the magical solution it provides.

"Ease his pain": Masculinity in the Eighties

The eighties are usually remembered as a time of greed and materialism, a time when the gulf between the rich and poor widened greatly in America. It is a decade associated with Ronald Reagan, the President whose focus on image and political conservativism has for many historians and critics come to define the eighties. Leonard Quart and Albert Auster describe this era as

> a second Gilded Age where conspicuous consumption was the norm--a great many stretch limousines and a great deal of nouvelle cuisine--an age whose commitment to profit, hedonism and modern technology basically subverted its conservative political rhetoric. Its heroes--and Reagan's speeches promoted individual heroism--were vulgar, aggressive entrepreneurs like Donald Trump and sharp Wall Street pirates like Ivan Boetsky whose operations skirted and went over the line into illegality. (140)

Discussing Reagan's popularity as President, Quart and Auster compare Reagan to the creature in *E.T.*, explaining how both "were eminently lovable, and just as Spielberg's Elliot finds solace from his problems in a fantastic creature, Reagan mouthed platitudes about traditional values and fled complexities inherent in bringing about social change or reshaping the economy" (146).[3] Reagan put America "back in the saddle," and the dominant image of masculinity was one of toughness, epitomized by Michael Douglas in the film *Wall Street*: tough hair, hypercompetitive, spouting phrases like "rip their guts out" and "lunch is for wimps."

But as Michael Kimmel argues, this aggressive, competitive, social Darwinist vision of masculinity often covered a fear of vulnerability and dependence:

> the manhood regained under Presidents Reagan and Bush was the compulsive masculinity of the schoolyard bully [...] a defensive and restive manhood, of men who needed to demonstrate their masculinity at every opportunity. Men who feel powerful in their lives do not need to wear "power ties" or eat "power breakfasts" or "'power lunches'" as did the yuppie arbitrageurs in the 1980s. Power is not something that is applied like a fashion accessory; it is both an inner confidence and security, as well as referring to a real hierarchical position. This kind of power American men still did not feel. (1996, 292)

In addition to continuing feelings of insecurity in the face of competition with other men, American men--particularly white, heterosexual men--were feeling increasingly threatened by social changes which they believed were undermining their position of social and economic privilege. As Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford argue in "The Forward March of Men Halted," "the social and economic changes of the past two decades are beginning to call masculinity into question," and these changes have resulted in anxious men who no longer have a clear, because privileged, sense of identity: "For men who were promised recognition and a secure place in the world, there lies ahead a frightening prospect: that masculinity will be shorn of its hierarchical power and will become simply one identity among others" (11). The pressure to compete in the marketplace and be a real man, not a "wimp," combined with an increasing challenge to

traditional models of masculinity and the institutional privilege it assumed, resulted in increasing numbers of men perceiving their masculinity to be in a state of crisis.

> We live in a time of fallen heroes. The monuments built of men, by men and for men have tumbled. Men have not just been brought to earth, their strengths put in perspective by their flaws. Even their virtues are suspect vices: power has turned out to be oppression, strength rigidity, self-sufficiency an inability to be emotionally close. Though it could still be argued that their economic and political clout still makes this "a man's world," the empire seems to be crumbling. Women--the most oppressed majority--have made incursions into men's traditional prerogatives and even more inroads into their confidence. If men still appear in control, their smug certainty is gone. It is a difficult time to be proud of being a man. (1)

These are the opening words of R. William Betcher and William S. Pollack's 1993 book *In a Time of Fallen Heroes*, and they echo the sentiments of many psychologists, sociologists and cultural theorists interested in the contemporary "crisis in masculinity." But while these and other authors speak of masculinity in general, what they are really addressing are the anxieties of men who fit into the category of hegemonic masculinity: straight, white, middle-class men who have up until recently enjoyed the privilege of assuming their subjectivity, their sense of a clearly defined identity within American culture. Responding to this crisis, writers began to discuss questions about masculinity and male experience, and were often divided on issues surrounding the nature of masculinity. Is male behaviour biologically determined? Is it socialized behaviour, and if so, should traditional models of masculinity be replaced by models which include traditionally feminine traits? Are there fixed sex roles, or is gender more discursive and performative?

The most popular and influential writer on the "crisis in masculinity" was Robert Bly, whose book *Iron John* (1990) "was the first [book] about men to gain prominence as a national best-seller" (Messner 8). For Bly, the primary problem faced by contemporary men is that society lacks effective myths and rituals through which men can learn to be proud of their masculinity. Deprived of this sense of connection to other men, and to the

past, men fall victim to various social forces which tame them and make them timid and ashamed of their manhood. As Bly explains,

> During the last thirty years men have been asked to learn how to go with the flow, how to follow rather than lead, how to live in a nonhierarchical way, how to be vulnerable, how to adopt consensus decision-making. Some women want a passive man if they want a man at all; the church wants a tamed man--they are called priests; the university wants a domesticated man--they are called tenure-track people; the corporation wants a team-worker, and so on. (61)

According to Bly, all of these external forces are part of a conspiracy against a virile, active masculinity: the Church, increasing bureaucratization, and the feminist movement all contribute to destroying the very masculine traits which in the past, according to Bly, helped establish both an effective masculine identity and a harmonious and productive society.

Given what Bly perceives are the shortcomings of contemporary gender roles, and the forces which conspire against men struggling to achieve a positive self-image, it is not surprising that Bly looks nostalgically to the past, particularly the mythic past, to find a means of reasserting a model of masculinity which will make men once again proud of being men, and will restore harmony to gender relations:

> We know that for hundreds of thousands of years men have admired each other, and been admired by women, in particular for their activity. Men and women alike once called on men to pierce the dangerous places, carry handfuls of courage to the waterfalls, dust the tails of the wild boars. All knew that if the men did that well the women and children could sleep safely. Now the boars have turned into pigs in the stockyard, and the rushing rivers to the waterfalls in the Museum of Modern Art courtyard. The activity men were once loved for is not required. (60)

By adopting traditional myths and rituals from other societies, Bly hopes to reconnect contemporary men with a traditional, and thus more satisfactory, model of masculinity, one which allows men to again perceive themselves as active and self-determining, as

warriors in contact with the Wild Man. More importantly, this reconnection to the past requires a reconnection with older men, with fathers and grandfathers who must take back the responsibility of educating and initiating the next generation of men.

A central issue identified by almost all writers discussing contemporary problems in masculinity involves the usually problematic relationship between father and son. In *Finding Our Fathers*, Samuel Osherson argues that men must resolve the conflicts with their fathers if they are to heal their own "father-wound":

> For men to feel empowered, to come to terms with our identities and deal honestly with our wives, our children and the demands of careers, means healing the wounded father within, an angry-sad version of ourselves that feels unloved and unlovable. That means coming to terms with that distorted person we never knew well enough: father. (18)

Agreeing with Osherson's emphasis on father/son relationships, but discussing the problem in more "mythopoetic" terms, Bly describes what he refers to as "father-hunger" (94). Contrasting contemporary North American society with traditional, pre-industrial society, Bly argues that men have recently learned to distrust their fathers, for their fathers are increasingly absent and no longer take responsibility for effectively socializing their sons and providing them with an effective model of masculinity:

> In our time, when the father shows up as an object of ridicule (as he does [...] on television), or a fit field for suspicion (as he does in Star Wars), or a bad tempered fool (when he comes home from the office with no teaching), or a weak puddle of indecision (as he stops inheriting kingly radiance), the son has a problem. How does he imagine his own life as a man? (99)

The primary problem with both Bly's explanation of the crisis in contemporary masculinity is that he addresses neither the historical nor the ideological implications of using the past as a means of improving the present. Bly never identifies the specific historical and social causes of the changes in how men are perceived, or perceive themselves: this crisis developed sometime between 1000 AD and the 1950s, but the particulars of how the present and past differ, and how times have changed without men themselves being somehow responsible, remain vague. The popularity of *Iron John*

suggests that the issues Bly raises were on the minds of men in the late eighties, but while his belief that the past holds the key to solving the present crisis in masculinity struck a cord with men, Bly's solution fails to address contemporary social reality and its economic and ideological complexities.

Equally problematic as Bly's reluctance to address historical particulars is his reliance on myths from other cultures to spark contemporary American men to reclaim their masculine subjectivity. In borrowing these myths without acknowledging their cultural particularity--Michael Kimmel describes Bly as encouraging men "to wander through anthropological literature like postmodern tourists" (1996, 319)--Bly creates the illusion of a transcultural, transhistorical masculinity with which contemporary men have lost contact; fortunately, this sense of male pride can be regained if we recognize the importance of returning to a world of fixed gender roles, a world where men hunted and protected, and women admired men for these activities. Of course, Bly conveniently avoids the fact that traditional masculine subjectivity has often relied on the denial of identity to others based on race, class, gender and sexuality. Clearly, old wisdom and universal archetypes should not be challenged, for it is this kind of thinking, Bly argues, that has led men to where they are now: anxious and unsatisfied.

Though I cannot argue that Phil Alden Robinson read *Iron John* before directing his film--the release of *Field of Dreams* preceded the publication of *Iron John* by one year--I do believe that the popularity of *Iron John* suggests that a strong interest in the idea of a "crisis in masculinity" existed at the time both works were produced. *Field of Dreams* is based on W. P. Kinsella's 1982 novel *Shoeless Joe*, but Robinson's adaptation shows that Robinson shares with Bly a desire to explore the late-eighties crisis in masculinity, an issue not addressed in Kinsella's novel. If one reads *Shoeless Joe* after seeing the film, as I did, one is struck by the fact that in the novel there is no conflict between Ray Kinsella and his father, no feeling of "father-hunger" that drives Ray on his quest. In *Shoeless Joe*, after Ray has completed the baseball park and has spoken to Shoeless Joe Jackson, he says of his father:

> How I wish my father could be here with me. If he'd lasted just a few months longer, he could have watched our grainy black-and-white TV as

> Bill Mazeroski homered in the bottom of the 9th to beat the Yankees 10-9. We would have joined hands and danced around the kitchen like madmen. "The Yankees lose so seldom you have to celebrate every single time," he used to say. We were always going to go to a major-league baseball game, he and I. But the time was never right, the money always needed for something else. (Kinsella 13)

Ray harbours no feelings of resentment toward his father, and Kinsella portrays Ray as building his magical field in order to motivate J.D. Salinger to write again: Ray loves *The Catcher in the Rye* and feels it is a tragedy that Salinger has stopped writing.

Even more telling of Robinson's focus on issues of masculinity and patriarchy is the fact that while in the film it is Ray's father whom Ray must redeem in order to resolve his own feelings of fear and confusion, in Kinsella's novel it is Ray's mother from whom Ray seeks approval after completing the field. Remembering back to his feelings of guilt after killing a sparrow and showing it to his mother with expectations of praise, only to have her say "Bring it back to life" (Kinsella 31), Ray feels that the field he has built can atone for his actions and remove his guilt: "I feel desperate for someone else to see my creation. My mother. I would like to show it to her. Let her see what I have brought to life. Let her be there when my catcher [Ray's father] gets to play with the White Sox, as I know he will. What I've brought to life is much, much more than one tiny bird" (83-4). Addressing very different social and historical concerns than Kinsella,[4] and communicating very different ideological implications, Robinson completely rewrites the role Ray's mother plays in Ray's life: in the novel she is still alive, while in the film she died when Ray is three years old, thus becoming a "problem" which contributes to the friction between Ray and his father. Discussing the implications of these changes, Mary Kirtz argues that

> While no film preserves all of a novel's complexities, this novel's emphasis on the need to include equally masculine and feminine principles in a quest for human and spiritual wholeness is consistently and relentlessly undermined and replaced by a strong reinforcement of the patriarchal model so dear to those holding the dominant political power during the last

> decade. During the 1980s, films extolling patriarchal values and male virtues were ascendant, reinforcing the main political message being sent by Reagan's Washington. (29)

But was the "message being sent" because men felt powerful in the eighties or, as Michael Kimmel argued in a quotation I cited earlier, was this need to assert patriarchy and traditional masculinity a response to feelings of threat and anxiety, as Bly and others writing on the "crisis in masculinity" suggest?

Adult Priorities, Youthful Ideals: Overcoming the Myth of the Sixties

Related to the late-eighties "crisis in masculinity," and another aspect of social history which has been largely overlooked by critics discussing "Reaganite entertainment," but which is essential for understanding the social and political context of *Field of Dreams*, is the transformation of the rebellious, idealistic young men and women of the sixties into the conservative, materialistic entrepreneurs and yuppies of the eighties:

> Some commentators suggested that the yuppies included many reformed radicals from the 1960s. Former Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver became a born-again Christian and clothing designer. Fellow Panther Bobby Seale, who once shouted "Burn, baby, burn," became a chef and made a videotape called "Barbecuing with Bobby." David Horowitz, an SDS activist and one-time editor of *Ramparts* magazine, became a Reagan Republican. Actress Jane Fonda, nicknamed "Hanoi Jane" because of her sympathy for the Communist side during the Vietnam War, made a fortune producing exercise videos. (Schaller, Scharff, and Schulzinger 514)

While many former radicals seemed to accept the new political and social values of the eighties without thought, or with untroubled feelings of nostalgia for idealistic youth, many yuppies felt guilty about "selling out" and tried to rationalize their present behaviour or minimize the significance of the sixties. In an interview with Janet Fitch, Phil Alden Robinson makes clear that these questions about sixties idealism and their abandonment in the eighties were a central concern he wished to explore in *Field of Dreams*: "Our generation [...] the 60s generation, had dreams that anything was possible. What

happened to that idealism? There is a Bruce Springsteen song that asks 'Is a dream a lie if it don't come true, or is it something worse?'" (62).

The Big Chill (1983) was one of the first films to explore this anxiety over the loss of commitment to sixties ideals in the face of the economic and social realities of the eighties. The film focuses on the lives of seven friends who were "radicals" at the University of Michigan in the late sixties, most of whom have since become highly paid professionals who have accepted the materialism of the eighties while still listening to sixties music and reminiscing about the good old days. Brought together by the suicide of their college friend Alex, who had refused a graduate fellowship in physics and instead drifted between dead-end jobs--his friends believe he is wasting his life--these former campus radicals begin to question whether their actions and ideals made a difference, or "whether it was all just fashion."[5] Though these issues of fashion versus political commitment and youthful ideals versus present realities are raised by the film, their implications are glossed over by the warm feeling the film's ending creates. The friends seem to overcome their guilt and rationalizations about the past by agreeing to stay in touch, suggesting that their personal involvement and shared memories will help them survive both "the big chill" of the eighties and the admission that they have abandoned the "radical" beliefs of their youth.

The critically acclaimed television series *thirtysomething* also addressed these questions about the conflict between past ideals and present realities and responsibilities. In the pilot episode (1987) Michael, who majored in philosophy and wanted to be a novelist, but instead ended up in advertising to support his wife and child, is trying to adjust to the realities of eighties business and its compromising of his integrity and social conscience. Elliot, his partner, makes clear to Michael the adult priorities which he now has to accept: "'We won't always have to deal with sleazeballs like Teller. We'll deal with higher-class sleazeballs. We'll come back to win another day. But right now we got two wives, three kids, four cars, two mortgages and a payroll. And that's life, pal. You be the breadwinner now.'" Over the next four seasons, as Michael becomes more powerful in the world of advertising, his wife Hope occasionally reminds him of his ideals while he reminds her of his financial responsibility to her and their children. Like *The Big Chill*,

thirtysomething focuses on the importance of friends and of accepting responsibility for providing for ones family.[6] No longer free and easy teenagers living in the "Age of Aquarius," the adults and parents of the eighties are told that they should stop feeling guilty about no longer being idealistic, and that they should simply accept the present reality and the new priorities that come with growing up.

Robinson reveals his desire to explore the continuing effects of the sixties on men who are facing middle-age and a new social reality in the eighties by changing the age, and thus the experiences, of W. P. Kinsella's main character, Ray Kinsella. In *Shoeless Joe*, Ray Kinsella is a teen of the conservative fifties whose rebelliousness extends as far as his enjoyment of *The Catcher in the Rye* and its anti-hero Holden Caulfield. While the novel's Ray went to University of Iowa, the Ray of the film went to Berkeley, the centre of the hippie movement and sixties radicalism, because it was geographically and ideologically as far from his father as he could get. Ray explains in the opening voice-over how "my major was English, but my real major was the sixties. I marched. I smoked a little grass. I tried to like sitar music." Robinson's Ray seems unsure about the fashion that went with the ideals, but he still has dreams and holds on to one connection to the sixties: the Volkswagon bus, prime symbol of the hippie, that Ray still drives and which takes him on his quest to meet the political and Civil Rights activist and author of *The Boat Rocker*, Terence Mann. In contrast, Kinsella's Ray is searching for J.D. Salinger, rebellious but not publicly political author, and undertakes his quest in a generic, unsymbolic "battered Datsun" (36). *Shoeless Joe* is a writerly novel about one man's wish to rescue J.D. Salinger by helping him rediscover the magic of baseball, and a passion for life and for the game which will make him want to write again. In contrast, *Field of Dreams* is about one representative middle-class, white, heterosexual, man's mid-life crisis--Ray explains how "before I heard the voice, I had never done a crazy thing in my life"--a crisis which reflects the broader sense of anxiety and guilt experienced by the rebellious sons of the sixties who are now becoming the fathers of the eighties, and are searching for something to replace their lost idealism--or at least rationalize their becoming mainstream--and help them address their anxieties about their role as men.

In a voice-over spoken by Ray as the film begins, Robinson introduces the

father/son conflict which comes to define Ray's self-perception and determine the nature and reason for his eventual quest. Early in the film, Ray explains to his wife his fears about growing old and becoming like his father, the man he rebelled against: "I'm 36 years old, I have a wife, a child and a mortgage and I'm scared to death I'm turning into my father." For Ray, his father represents a world without dreams and ideals, a man broken and tamed by life and bitter about never becoming a professional baseball player. In Bly's terms, Ray's father lost his "wildness," and Ray is unable to forgive him for that, for he fears that this same "wound" remains unhealed in him and may eventually lead him to suffer his father's fate. Ray explains how "I never forgave my father for getting old," but now that Ray himself is getting older and has a family, he too is beginning to learn about responsibility, and the reality of losing his freedom and "wildness."

Though a fantasy which relies on nostalgia and illusion for its resolution, *Field of Dreams* is not simply a story portraying "universal American themes;" rather, it is a historically situated narrative which addresses the particular concerns of white, middle-class male baby boomers. It may be a film about redemption and self-discovery, but it focuses on the anxieties of men like Ray who grew up in the sixties and were involved, to varying degrees, with the counter-culture, and who are now beginning to recognize the responsibilities and difficulties their Depression-era fathers faced, something they refused to recognize when they chanted "trust no one over 30." Though the sixties are often remembered as the last great age of idealism in America, and as a decade which saw important social and political changes--most importantly, Civil Rights--the film criticizes the sixties, reducing it to a symbolic rebellion by youth against age, a rebellion which these young men have outgrown and now regret.[7] According to the film, the sixties failed to make a lasting difference, and merely created a rift between generations; in the eighties, the ideals and hopes of that decade are no longer retrievable, except through memory and nostalgia. And as Ray has discovered, this nostalgia does not provide comfort, but instead reminds him of his separation from his father, and of the fact that he has, to a degree, sold out. Ray's wife Annie, who still finds comfort in a nostalgia for the sixties, believes that it is "just like the sixties" when she stops her community from banning Terence Mann's novel *The Boat Rocker*[8]--"I've just helped stop the spread of neo-Fascism in America,"

she exclaims to Ray--but this scene is treated almost as a caricature. Faced with bigger problems which Annie seems unable to understand, Ray remains troubled by the voice he has heard in the field, for he is unsure of what he must do. The film suggests that while Annie can be satisfied with memories of the sixties, Ray needs something more to relieve his feelings of anxiety and frustration and give him a new sense of direction and purpose.

The film's criticism of the sixties is made even more apparent through the character of Terence Mann. Mann remains a hero to both Ray and Annie, but Ray also recognizes that Mann is the writer who was responsible for Ray,s rebellion against his father in the sixties. Mann was at the centre of the Civil Rights Movement--Ray underlines Mann's important role in the counter-culture by reminding his wife how Mann "hung out with the Beatles,"--and was, in Mann's own words, "the east coast distributor of involved." Ray searches for his hero because Mann dropped out of political involvement in the early seventies, but when Ray finds him, Mann tells Ray that if he is from the sixties, he should "Go back! There is no place for you here in the future." For someone who was so deeply committed to social change, Mann never acknowledges the advances in civil rights or the effect the counter-culture had on the Vietnam War; he has simply become cynical and thus apolitical. Mann's belief that the counter-culture failed to effect lasting social and political change, and was more about image than politics, is expressed in his summary of the sixties--"Remember this? 'Peace! Love! Dope!'"--and in his explanation of why he stopped writing: "I want them to stop looking to me for answers. I want them to start thinking for themselves." Seeing Ray's commitment to his mysterious quest, Mann explains how he wishes he could find something to restore the commitment he felt in the sixties, and thus help him overcome his cynical reaction to the failure of that decade: "I wish I had your passion, Ray. Misdirected though it might be, it is still a passion. I used to feel that way about things." Mann joins Ray on his quest, and discovers a world of joy and hope at Ray's "field of dreams," a place which, according to the film, exists outside history and transcends issues of race, class, and politics.

"Hey, Dad. You wanna have a catch?"

The relationships which Ray experiences with his heroes--Shoeless Joe Jackson, Terence

Mann, Moonlight Graham--during his crisis/quest all lead Ray to his father, and to the discovery of a source of masculine subjectivity which is more durable and satisfying than that provided by either his present role as a father and husband or by the memory of his role as someone who hoped to make a difference in the radical sixties. To resolve his anxieties, Ray does not escape on a Wild Man Weekend, an offshoot of Bly's book which involved men rediscovering their inner Wild Man by gathering together in the forest, away from women; instead, Ray discovers a replacement for his lost idealism through his magical quest, a thing to believe in which is not fixed temporally but exists as a transhistorical, transgenerational signifier which links all men: Ray discovers the redemptive power of baseball. As Terence Mann explains in that authoritative James Earl Jones voice, "the one constant through all the years has been baseball [...]. It reminds us of all that was once good, and can be again." If the sixties were about middle-class sons rebelling against their fathers, baseball is presented as transcending differences in age, class, and race. As Donald Hall explains:

> Baseball is the generations, looping backward and forever and with a million apparitions of sticks and balls, cricket and rounders, and the games of the Iroquois played in Connecticut before the English came. Baseball is fathers and sons playing catch, lazy and murderous, wild and controlled, the profound archaic song of birth, growth, age, and death. The diamond encloses what we are [...].
>
> Baseball connects American males with each other, not only through bleacher friendships and neighborhood loyalties, not only through barroom fights, but, most importantly, through generations. (qtd. in Betcher and Pollack 182-3)

According to Hall, baseball is about men being boys who bond with other boys, all of whom desire a game with clear rules and set dimensions. Baseball provides a place where men can be their best, where individual effort is rewarded, where one plays a small part in a greater whole, and where one's role and purpose are clearly defined. Ray's quest leads him to his father, to baseball, and to a recognition that age and responsibility need not be feared: all one needs is the game.

Field of Dreams uses baseball as a means of helping men regain their sense of masculinity, and thus Ray's "field of dreams" is like the site of a Wild Man Weekend, for Ray's magic baseball park is a place where men can gather to help other men learn about manhood and express their fears, dreams and regrets. The heroes that Ray encounters are all idealistic men who made their dreams a reality, only to have them taken away by personal or historical circumstances. Shoeless Joe was unfairly banned from baseball; Terence Mann went into hiding after seeing sixties idealism replaced by seventies cynicism; and Moonlight Graham, though happy as a doctor and husband, still wished he could have had his one Major League at bat. All these men gain redemption through Ray's "field of dreams." Shoeless Joe gets to play again with the other seven members of the 1919 "Black" Sox, the team that accepted money to lose the World Series. *Field of Dreams* portrays Shoeless Joe and his teammates as blameless, but the film never discusses the question of why they accepted money to lose, and instead focuses on the effect their being banned had on Shoeless Joe.[9] Terence Mann overcomes his feelings of cynicism by rediscovering the wonder and magic of baseball, and by disappearing into the corn field, he undertakes a new quest to find a subject about which he has a passion to write. Moonlight Graham gets his chance to bat in the Majors, and receives Shoeless Joe's assurance that "you were good," before choosing to leave the baseball field to save Ray's daughter, and thus take up the role he chose in life: a small town doctor. Ray helps these men to fulfill their dreams and Ray, in turn, learns about loss and regret and about the reality of adult choices and responsibilities and their effect on youthful male dreams and ideals.

Ray's quest reflects his need to learn how to reconcile himself with who his father was and with the fact that men grow older and often lose their youthful idealism in the face of necessity and compromise. Speaking with Annie early in the film, Ray explains the central role his father plays in his feeling of anxiety:

> "I'm scared to death I'm turning into my father."
>
> "What does your father have to do with this?"
>
> "I never forgave him for getting old."

Bly would say that Ray misperceives his father as "a fit field for suspicion" and "a weak

puddle of indecision" because, as Ray admits when he finally sees his father as a young catcher in the game at the end of the film, "I only saw him years later, when he was worn down by life." Ray's quest has brought Ray and his father together, the magic of the field giving Ray a chance to see his father as a young man with dreams, an important part of healing the "father-wound": "One way of healing the wounded father is to plunge into your father's history. A man needs to find ways of empathizing with his father's pain [...]. We have to understand our father's struggle and see the broken connection between fathers and sons as part of the unfinished business of manhood" (Osherson 206). Having refused a game of catch as a teenager who had just read Terence Mann's *The Boat Rocker*, Ray now gains a glimpse into his "father's history," and heals the wound caused by his rebellion by asking "Hey, Dad. You wanna have a catch?" Ray has learned not to fear becoming his father and has learned from him and the other men he has helped that accepting adult responsibilities does not necessarily mean losing one's hopes and dreams. Terence Mann's parting words to Ray echo the new priorities of sixties sons turned eighties fathers: "Take care of this family."

Though I was moved by the end of the film, I also recognize that there is something hidden beneath the warm feeling one gets as Ray plays catch with his father in the cool Iowa evening. Filmgoers may like to leave the film believing, as critic Linda S. Joffe does, that Ray's "field of dreams," "this magical church, the baseball field, untouched by secular sin, encompasses the ultimate religion. Devoid of avarice and envy, what remains are childlike wonder, a cyclical process of rebirth, and the power of rebirth. It is sad to realize that greed and pride have infiltrated our secular baseball field" (162). "Greed" may not be Ray's motivation for building his baseball field, but Ray does benefit financially from the selling of baseball and nostalgia to people who desire an escape from their present anxieties into an idealized past. Ray fulfills his quest, redeems his heroes and his father, and overcomes his own feelings of anxiety and guilt by rediscovering the magic of baseball, a magic which is financed through the commodification of nostalgia. The real magic of the film is the way it allows Ray to regain a sense of youthful idealism and still be the president of a small company--a sort of Graceland of the Midwest--which finances his "field of dreams" and enables others to purchase this same sense of nostalgia at $20 per

ticket. Terence Mann helps justify this commodification by explaining what the customers will get--"The memories will be so thick, they will have to brush them away from their faces"--and why they will pay for this nostalgia--"...it's money they have, and peace they lack." Ray has discovered a solution to the contradictory experience of being a man in the eighties: he does not have to sacrifice youthful ideals to adult obligations because his magical "field of dreams" allows him the freedom to pursue and fulfill his dreams, and yet maintain his place as a responsible provider for his family. It certainly is a wonderful life.

Field of Dreams portrays baseball as something through which all men, regardless of age, race, and class, can find a sense of hope, wonder and connection with other men, and portrays Ray's field as a place where they can come and nostalgically rediscover the innocence of childhood. And while the decision to cast James Earl Jones as Terence Mann, the character meant to represent a sixties J.D. Salinger, may reflect this desire to portray baseball as transcending the issue of race, Mann's presence as an African American inevitably raises issues of race and segregation in baseball which the film refuses to address. According to Mann, people will come to Ray's field to experience the joyous memories of baseball and childhood, but one has to question whether an African American man who dreamed of playing at Ebbets Field, and later became a central figure in the Civil Rights movement, can watch a pre-Jackie Robinson baseball team and experience only warm feelings of nostalgia. Mann would be perfectly aware of the fact that "Thirty years after Shoeless Joe, Jackie Robinson encountered not only outrageous indignities and violence from fans and other ballplayers, but racial hatred from his fellow Dodgers. This was certainly the experience of many non-white players and other ethnic players, nor has racism been eliminated from contemporary baseball" (Gretton 74). Jackie Robinson does not make an appearance on Ray's "field of dreams" and there seem to be no Negro League players invited to show their abilities against the white legends of early baseball history. As Alan Nadel explains, "black Americans cannot solve the[ir contemporary] problem[s] with a miraculous return to a simpler period in American history, because the oblique whiteness of the dominant cultural norms in those earlier periods--the obliviousness to the complexity of social injustice, the blindness to racial difference--is exactly what rendered those periods 'simpler'" (1997, 70). Straight, white men like Ray

can escape the contemporary "crisis in masculinity" by looking nostalgically to an idealized past because in that past they enjoyed a sense of masculine identity that seemed untroubled because it was as yet uncontested. Conversely, as an African American who has experienced racism and segregation in American society, and has seen it in baseball, Terence Mann cannot realistically look to a comforting past to help him escape his present anxieties which, because of his race, remain distinct from those anxieties experienced by Ray and the other white men in the film.[10]

Exploring the issue of race in *Field of Dreams*, among other eighties films, Alan Nadel concludes that "Within the cultural narratives of President Reagan's America, the only appropriate role for the black is to be complicitous with his own invisibility" (1997, 39). Despite his central role in the Civil Rights movement, Mann never introduces the issue of racism explicitly; in fact, the audience is reassured "that Mann's politics are unthreatening and that he is a secret fan of the game, [and thus] Mann's 'radical' status evaporates with his complicity in [Ray] Kinsella's fantasy" (Gretton 74). But Mann is presented as complicitous not only by remaining silent on the issue of racism in baseball, and by disappearing into the corn field with the baseball players, but also by accompanying these men as a writer, not as a fellow player. In the novel *Shoeless Joe*, J.D. Salinger wonders,

> Ray, do you think the Polo Grounds might just be floating around out there? Do you think I might get to play, or, like Eddie Scissons, get to sit in the stands the way I am now and see a twenty-year-old kid, with a smooth face and black, pompadoured hair, try out with the 1938 Giants? I think that is what I would like to do. (Kinsella 223)

Terence Mann also "dreamed of playing for the Dodgers," but to pursue this dream would involve creating a different fantasy, and revealing a different history, than that which Ray desires. Instead, Mann happily accompanies the ball players as a writer in search of a topic which will give him the inspiration to write again, and thus as an observer and not a participant in a history which has already excluded him. Mann never asks for the chance to try out for the team, and thus never overtly raises the specter of racism which has shaped the history of professional baseball in America, a history which the film replaces

with a more nostalgic, mythologized version of baseball's past.

And it is finally this preference for myth and nostalgia over history and ideology that has made the film so endearing to some and so unsettling to others. While the film reproduces many aspects of traditional American cultural mythology, *Field of Dreams* is finally a film about men in the late-eighties like Ray who, though continuing to benefit from the power of patriarchy, actually perceive themselves as threatened by changes which are leaving them unempowered and at the mercy of their social and historical environment. Though valuable in addressing this sense of threat created by recent socio-economic and cultural changes in American society, *Field of Dreams*, like *Iron John*, remains problematic in its idealization of a past when an untroubled hegemonic masculine subjectivity was achieved through the oppression of women and men who, due to race, class, and/or sexuality, were denied a sense of identity. Though its ending is comforting to many, *Field of Dreams* provides a problematic solution to the crisis in masculinity because viewers who have praised *Field of Dreams* have interpreted it as communicating nostalgic, mythic American ideals, a reading which precludes the film's ability to address real social and ideological contradictions in the present, or to recognize these contradictions in the past. If straight, white, middle-class men once enjoyed a privileged, unchallenged sense of identity, it is because these very ideological contradictions were ignored in the past; and if there is truly a contemporary "crisis in masculinity," it exists because those denied identity in the past have begun to voice these contradictions, and thus begun to problematize hegemonic masculinity in the present.

Notes

1. Cited in Jacobson, and "culled from a few of the Usual Suspects" (78), by which he means critics from mainstream newspapers and magazines who do not discuss the political or ideological nature of films.

2. See Wood for a more detailed discussion of Reaganite cinema. Also, see Nadel 1997 for a more recent discussion of Reaganite aspects of eighties Hollywood film.

3. For a detailed discussion of *E.T.*, and of Stephen Spielberg as the central reproducer of Reaganite ideology on film, see Britton (29-42).

4. I argue that the primary influences on the issues which W. P. Kinsella and Phil Alden Robinson explore are historical and generational, but one could also argue that their very different concerns and relationship to American cultural mythology is related to the fact that Kinsella is a Canadian who lived in Iowa while attending the University of Iowa, while Robinson is American. For a discussion of how nationality influences the ideology communicated in *Shoeless Joe* and *Field of Dreams*, see Kirtz.

5. See Quart and Auster (76) for a discussion of the role of image and fashion in sixties counter-culture.

6. In an interview, *thirtysomething* co-creator Edward Zwick explained that "What the show has in its dark corners is the issue of disenfranchisement. All of us in the 60s generation, having been part of a community that talked a lot about tribes and communality of experience, are now living very disparate lives and [feel somewhat] cut off" (Hersch 64).

7. Discussing the rewriting of history in *Forrest Gump*, Thomas Byers argues that the film undermines the importance of the sixties counter-culture by reinterpreting it through the hegemonic, patriarchal "New Right ideology that has recently come to dominate American political discourse" (426). I find Byers' reliance on psychoanalytic theory somewhat problematic, for while he argues that "as we identify with Forrest's point of view, all significant historical differences are flattened out" (427), Byers himself relies less on historical particularity than on transhistorical, transcultural notions such as castration anxiety and the Oedipal complex to explain contemporary political and ideological issues.

8. The ridiculous title *The Boat Rocker* reflects the film's trivialization of the sixties, as the title suggests one who makes trouble by rocking the boat, an act which ends up with everyone, even the one doing the rocking, wet or drowned. Again, this title suggest that the social movements of the sixties did little of value, and only managed to unsettle those who tried to keep the boat--American society--steady and on course through the sixties.

9. See Burns, volume three, for a detailed discussion of Charles Chomisky's exploitation of White Sox players, as well as the labour unrest created by the "reserve clause," which made a player the exclusive property of the team owner, resulting in what pitcher Walter Johnson in 1911 called "baseball slavery." John Sayles goes into far more detail about the

context and complexities of the losing of the World Series in his 1988 film *Eight Men Out*.

10. A detailed discussion of the issues of racism and segregation in baseball is beyond the scope of this chapter. Again, Ken Burns addresses the issue of racism extensively in *Baseball*, and focuses much of Volume Six on Jackie Robinson. Also, see Zoss and Bowman who provide a very different history of baseball than that portrayed in *Field of Dreams*.

CHAPTER SIX: "Other" Masculinities

In my "Introduction" I discussed the issue of canonicity and the problem of assuming that the American literary canon is simply a list of books to which non-canonical writers could be included. I quoted Russell Reising, who argues that inclusion simply means applying mainstream theories of literature to non-mainstream texts. The problem with searching for canonical themes, for example, in previously excluded literary works involves both ignoring the complexities and politics portrayed through the individual text, and failing to question the universality of those canonical themes. Most contemporary critics celebrate Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* as an exploration of the frustration and alienation of an African American male narrator who struggles to obtain a sense of identity and agency that American culture promises its (at least male) citizens, and in the process discovers that the racist beliefs held by mainstream society deny him a subjectivity by projecting onto him an identity derived from racial stereotypes. And while earlier critics also discussed issues of race and identity, much of *Invisible Man*'s early critical success resulted from critics situating these issues within the broader transcultural traditions of Modernism. Discussed as a Modernist challenge to Richard Wright's angry naturalism, *Invisible Man* was celebrated for its subtly and complexity, its impressionistic, stream-of-consciousness style, its allusions to canonical literary tradition, its use of symbolism, and its themes of alienation, struggle, and questing for truth.[1]

While early critics explored in detail Ellison's reliance on the psychological theories of Freud and Jung, and revealed his allusions to Emerson, Poe, and Dostoevsky, few critics explored in such detail the influence of African American writers such as W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. Through his narrator, Ellison explores the American myth of self-making, the belief that through hard work and discipline any man in America can rise from poverty and be successful. Ellison reveals that while white American men have been taught that self-making, the basis of American masculine subjectivity, is their inalienable right, society denies this right to African American men who are instead forced to perform an identity based on mainstream society's stereotypes of African Americans. Portraying the limits of "performance" and "imitation," to use

Judith Butler's terms, as a method of resistance, Ellison reveals the narrator's frustration at his invisibility and his attempts to establish a sense of masculine subjectivity in a culture which denies him a socially validated identity.

Andrew Holleran's novel, *Dancer from the Dance*, is not as popular or studied a novel as *Invisible Man*, most likely because the issue of homosexuality and the representation of gay culture are not, even today, as accepted and discussed as African American literature and culture. Yet, within the context of gay literature, Holleran's 1978 novel represents a breakthrough, as it was one of the first openly gay novels to be published by a mainstream publisher and it has, for many, become a classic of gay literature and part of the "gay canon." What made the novel popular within the gay community, and a critical success among mainstream critics? I will argue that the process involved critics focusing on the aesthetic qualities of *Dancer from the Dance*, for it has been read as a nostalgic novel which, following the style and symbolism of *The Great Gatsby*, portrays Malone as symbolic of the beauty and sadness of gay culture. Challenging this argument that Holleran's novel is simply a homage to, or derivative of, *The Great Gatsby*, I will discuss the issue of the novel's popularity within mainstream culture, and will explore the political aspects of 70s New York gay culture that the novel very subtly addresses, but which critics have largely overlooked. I will also discuss how Holleran uses a narrative of homosocial mediation, and its accompanying sense of nostalgia, to explore how stereotypes of gay culture contribute to the novel's popularity, and how Holleran addresses issues of literary popularity, audience expectations, and the limits of myth and symbolism to reveal the complexity and diversity of gay cultures.

Words Made Flesh: Narration, Self-Making, and the Limits of Performance in *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is a novel about identity, or rather about a search for identity. Unlike the narrators of the previous novels I have discussed, Ellison's narrator cannot look nostalgically to a past if he feels his assumed subjectivity is threatened, for as an African American he has no masculine subjectivity recognized by mainstream society: he feels American society denies him the power of self-definition, and instead projects

onto him identities which he eventually recognizes render him invisible. Through the narrator's experience of this invisibility and his eventual act of self-discovery and self-definition, Ellison explores two possible models of identity which his narrator can recognize and embrace: an identity which is "performative," to use Judith Butler's term, or one which is more essential and arises from his rejecting the identity others have given him, and from his understanding the past experiences which comprise his identity. As I will argue, Ellison presents his narrator as finally choosing the latter, for a performative model of identity, represented as liberating by contemporary theorists such as Judith Butler, remains problematic for Ellison; influenced by W. E. B. DuBois' idea of the "double-consciousness" of African Americans, Ellison sees performance as reinscribing rather than challenging the stereotypes created by white culture. Ellison is unwilling to accept the ambivalence and "double-consciousness" inherent in a performative model of identity, and instead argues for an identity established through the self-defining acts of reflection and narration.

Ellison's narrator also differs from the other narrators I have discussed in that he has no hero to mourn or render symbolic, no ideal of a threatened masculinity he longs to celebrate. Through his narration, Ellison's narrator does present relationships with men whom he has met during his life, men who have influenced him and taught him valuable lessons; however, these men do not provide him with a means of self-discovery, but instead with strategies for surviving within a system which denies African American men masculine subjectivity and political agency. Booker T. Washington, his grandfather, Dr. Bledsoe, Trueblood, the veteran, and Rinehart all try to teach the narrator methods of working within a system that denies privilege and identity to African Americans, but the narrator recognizes that if he wishes to establish a true sense of personal identity which will lead to empowerment and the potential for social change, he must reject a performative model of identity which he recognizes simply reinforces mainstream society's expectations and beliefs in racial stereotypes.

Unlike Ellison, who I will argue dramatizes a performative model of identity only to reject it because of what he sees are its negative implications, many contemporary theorists embrace a performative model of identity. Focusing on issues of gender and

sexuality, Judith Butler argues that "performance" and "imitation" problematize assumptions about the essentialism of identity. As Butler explains in her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," "there is no 'proper' gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property. Where the notion of the proper operates, it is always and only *improperly* installed as the effect of a compulsory system" (312-13). Dismissing the idea of an essential self outwardly expressed through actions and appearance, Butler argues that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its result" (25). As in the case of gender, a performative model of identity reveals assumptions about race to be constructs reproduced and naturalized through dominant discourse, constructs which Butler believes are always at risk of being subverted.

Teresa de Lauretis argues that to avoid being marginalized, whether along lines of gender or race--to avoid being fixed by the definitions of dominant discourse while being excluded from it--one must remain unfixed by imitating that dominant discourse: "The only way to position oneself outside of that discourse is to displace oneself within it--to refuse the question as formulated, to answer deviously, even to quote (but against the grain)" (7). Butler and de Lauretis suggest that if the dominant discourse is a construct, it can be imitated, inhabited in form while being subverted in content and meaning. If mainstream authority and the identities it legitimizes are the *effect* of a compulsory system, of ideology enacted through discourse, then language, conventions, and stereotypes can be used by or against the dominant culture, and thus can reveal the cultural and historical--the ideological--nature of cultural assumptions represented as natural.

Though Judith Butler argues for the effectiveness of "imitation" as a means of subversion, she also admits in her later book *Bodies That Matter* that this strategy has its limitation. Though she maintains that identity is performative, she explains that the effective representation of this fact through imitation depends upon a correct, subversive reading of this strategy. In a section entitled "Ambivalent Drag," Butler explains that

> Although many readers understood *Gender Trouble* to be arguing for the proliferation of drag performances as a way of subverting dominant gender

> norms, I want to underscore that there is no necessary relationship between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic gender norms. At best, drag is the site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power one opposes. (125)

In "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Homi K. Bhabba also discusses the inherent ambivalence of the strategy of "mimicry":

> the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually reproduce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. (126)

The ambivalence that Butler and Bhabba describe results from the fact that if imitation is not understood as subversive, if its slippages and gaps are not perceived, then this strategy can actually reinforce rather than challenge dominant discourse. This ambivalent quality of the strategy of imitation arises because it is by nature oppositional: it relies on mimicking the language of dominant discourse, rather than on creating an independent discourse which can effectively articulate the particularities of a marginalized, or in the case of Ellison's narrator, invisible self.

Ellison's opposition to imitation as a means of resistance arises from his recognition that imitation both challenges and reinforces stereotypes and expectations defined by white culture, an ambivalence his narrator fails to recognize or understand. Influenced by W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), Ellison dramatizes the psychological damage he believes results from the need to maintain a second self to display to white society, damage resulting from what DuBois refers to as a "double-consciousness":

> the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-

> sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, by measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.
>
> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge this double self into a better and truer self. (DuBois 214-15)

Ellison explores DuBois' idea of "double-consciousness" through the metaphor of invisibility: the narrator begins his story by stating "I am an invisible man" (3), his invisibility resulting from a lack of individual identity in the minds of a white society which perceives him through racial stereotypes. As the narrator explains, like any other man he is "a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids--and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (3). He may be physically like any other man, but because of the color of his skin, others do not see him as an individual with a sense of subjectivity through which he can define himself; instead, "they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me" (3). Ellison's narrator is not mourning, nor expressing anger over, the loss of an assumed subjectivity taken away from him by social change; rather, he is sharing what he has learned through his remembering back over his experiences as an invisible man: that he once assumed, naively he now realizes, that being a man in American meant being entitled to a "self-conscious manhood," to use DuBois' phrase, that would give him an identity recognized by mainstream American society.

In a 1955 interview, Ellison said of his narrator, "The major flaw in the hero's character is his unquestioning willingness to do what is required of him by others as a way

to success, and this was the specific form of his 'innocence'" (1994, 177). The narrator's desire to please others stems from his earliest role model of success and masculine behaviour: he explains how "In those pre-invisible days I visualized myself as a potential Booker T. Washington" (17-8). In his immensely influential autobiography, *Up From Slavery* (1901), Washington chronicled how, through patience, hard work, and perseverance, he had worked himself from poverty to being the most influential African American in the United States, a man who was a model of African American behavior in the minds of many African Americans, as well as whites. The narrator tries to follow Washington's example, for he believes that being a model African American man, in the eyes of mainstream society, will benefit not only him, but also his family, community, and his people. Invited to make a graduation speech, the narrator proudly explains how "It was a great success. Everyone praised me and I was invited to give the speech at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens. It was a triumph for our whole community" (17).

But even as the narrator gives his speech, he is already beginning to question his belief in the validity of the role-model he has chosen, for he is haunted by the puzzling words of his dying grandfather: "Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust" (16). These words prompt the narrator to question whether he really should try to live up to and internalize the ideals of Booker T. Washington, or should simply make white society think he believes in these ideals. Are his actions and words a reflection of his own beliefs and identity, or is he simply playing a role that will help him survive in a society which perceives him through stereotypes to which he must learn to fit his behaviour? Discussing his graduation speech, the narrator explains how "I delivered an oration in which I showed that humility was the secret, the very essence of progress. (Not that I believed this--how could I, remembering my grandfather?--I only believed that it worked)" (17). Is being "praised by the most lily-white men in town" and being "considered an example of desirable conduct" beneficial to his people, or is it an act of "treachery" (16) as his grandfather suggested, a pandering to white expectations and stereotypes?

The question of whether the narrator's belief in hard work and humility constitutes an act of responsibility or complicity, self-definition or pragmatic role-playing, returns us to the ambivalent nature of imitation as a form of resistance. The narrator accepts Washington's model at face value; he assumes that Washington truly believes in the values he promotes and does not simply advocate them because they were what Southern and Northern whites wanted to hear. The narrator does not see "slippage" and "excess" revealed by Washington's words, and thus his acceptance reinscribes rather than problematizes these ideals. The narrator has internalized these values and thus they define his identity and future goals, so it is not surprising that he remains so troubled by his grandfather's words, and experiences further confusion when he meets a real-life Booker T. Washington: Dr. Bledsoe, president of the college the narrator attends and exemplary model of the successful African American man.

The narrator has been convinced that Dr. Bledsoe is a model that the narrator should emulate, for Bledsoe is a success and a credit to his race. Or at least Bledsoe portrays this image to the white benefactors of his college. The narrator soon sees in Dr. Bledsoe echoes of the words of his grandfather, words which still fill him with guilt and confusion. After experiencing Bledsoe's anger over what Bledsoe feels is the narrator's stupidity, the narrator feels "shocked" when at "a mirror Dr. Bledsoe stopped and composed his angry face like a sculptor, making it a bland mask, leaving only the sparkle of his eyes to betray the emotion that I had seen only moments before" (102). Despite his grandfather's advice and his experiences when giving his speech, the narrator holds on to his belief that humility and hard work will bring him success in America; he has not yet understood and accepted that he must let whites see what they want to see, and tell whites what they want to hear, if he is to succeed in mainstream America. This is a strategy that Bledsoe assumes even "'the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows[:] that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie'" (139).

Dr. Bledsoe is one of many male characters in the novel who try to teach the narrator that "self-conscious manhood" is too much for an African American man to expect in American culture, and that imitation, even with the resulting "double-consciousness," is the only means of survival and possible success. Dr. Bledsoe may

portray himself to whites as the model of a hard-working African American man that all other African American men should emulate, but the narrator gains a glimpse of the real processes of manipulation and role-playing that have enabled Bledsoe to achieve his position of power and authority, a position which benefits him personally, no matter what the expense to his fellow African Americans. Though Bledsoe reproduces the Booker T. Washington ideal of honesty, hard work, and humility in public, he admits to the narrator that to achieve his position, he had "'to wait and plan and lick around ... Yes, I had to act the nigger!'"; and now that he is in a position of power, Bledsoe will "'have every Negro in the county hanging on tree limbs by the morning if it means staying where I am'" (143). Bledsoe tries to cure the narrator of his naive illusions, showing him that the only way achieve any sense of manhood in America is by acting subserviently to whites in order to gain subtle forms of power within white society and more obvious power over other African Americans. As Bledsoe explains, "'I's big and black and I say 'Yes, suh' as loudly as any burrhead when it's convenient, but I'm still king down here. I don't care how much it appears otherwise'" (142).

Dr. Bledsoe is not the only teacher who offers the narrator a strategy for playing on white expectations in order to survive and succeed in white society. The character of Trueblood, whom the narrator meets while driving the rich, white Mr. Norton around the college, relies on stereotypes very different than those suggested by Dr. Bledsoe; nevertheless, he shares with Bledsoe the recognition that personal gain is best achieved by reinforcing, rather than challenging, mainstream society's racial stereotypes. Mark Busby argues that Trueblood represents a positive model for the narrator, for through "tale-telling" Trueblood "offers the narrator a model for overcoming his own invisibility" (47). Houston A. Baker suggests that "Trueblood [...] adopts tale-telling (which is often conflated with lying in the black oral tradition) as a mode of expression that allows him a degree of dignity and freedom within the confines of a severe white hegemony" (195). What both of these critics overlook is the fact that the effectiveness of Trueblood's tale-telling relies on his humiliating himself by revealing his involvement in incest; in other words, he positions himself as a victim in order to gain white sympathy and its resulting monetary reward. Ellison explains in his 1964 essay "The World and the Jug" that there is

an African American "tradition which abhors as obscene any trading on one's own anguish for gain or sympathy" (1994, 111), and it is clearly this sort of trade that Trueblood is engaged in: though it may be for his personal gain, Trueblood provides Norton with an incest narrative which debases him personally and reinforces, even while it plays upon, negative white stereotypes of African Americans. Though he chooses another set of stereotypes to fit his context, Trueblood has, like Bledsoe, learned that the best way to benefit from white culture is to tell them "'the kind of lie [or tale] they want to hear'" (143). Despite the effectiveness of this strategy, the narrator remains too idealistic, or too naive, to accept that he cannot achieve and assert a sense of masculine subjectivity without constructing and maintaining a separate self to utilize when interacting with white society.

The narrator spends several years denying the necessity of playing a role based on white expectations, but he does finally recognize and utilize the strategy of playing upon stereotypes when he accidentally assumes the identity of Rinehart. The narrator is finally able to use the advice of his grandfather, Dr. Bledsoe, and Trueblood, as well as that of the supposedly insane doctor and W. W. I veteran whom he meets again, this time on the bus after the narrator is forced to leave the college. The veteran tells him,

> "for God's sake learn to look beneath the surface," he said. "Come out of the fog, young man. And remember you don't have to be a complete fool to succeed. Play the game, but don't believe in it--that much you owe yourself. Even if it lands you in a strait jacket or a padded cell. Play the game, but play it your own way--at least part of the time. Play the game, but raise the ante, my boy. Learn how it operates, learn how you operate." (153-4)

The narrator gains a glimpse into how the game works when he puts on the character of Rinehart, a man who has many roles and identities that he has learned how to use to his personal benefit. As Valerie Smith explains, Rinehart is the "consummate manipulator of surfaces: pimp, numbers runner, lover, and preacher, he is all things to all people" (41). Experiencing Rinehart's multiple roles, and realizing that he can assume another person's identity through his choice of clothing, actions, and mannerism, the narrator recognizes what others have been telling him for years.

> You could actually make yourself anew. The notion was frightening, for now the world flowed before my eyes. All boundaries down, freedom was not only the recognition of necessity, it was the recognition of possibility. And sitting there trembling I caught a brief glimpse of the possibilities posed by Rinehart's multiple personalities, and turned away. It was too vast and confusing to contemplate. Then I looked at the polished lenses and laughed. I had been trying simply to turn them into a disguise but they had become a political instrument instead; for if Rinehart could use them in his work, no doubt I could use them in mine. (499)

Finally recognizing the possibilities of performance as a form of subversion and resistance, a lesson he has been taught by several men during his life but has always refused to accept, the narrator finally rejects the Booker T. Washington model of hard work and humility as a means to success. Not yet recognizing the ambivalence of imitation nor the psychological fragmentation--the "double-consciousness"--that such a strategic use of identity necessitates, the narrator sees only freedom and possibility in his new model of African American male identity: "My God, what possibilities existed! And that spiral business, that progress goo. Who knew all the secrets; hadn't I changed my name and never been challenged even once? And that lie that success was a rising *upward*. What a crummy lie they kept us dominated by" (509-10).

Though he initially celebrates his discovery of imitation as a means of self-definition, the narrator eventually realizes that, as Judith Butler explained, imitation "may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of [...] norms" because it involves "being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes" (1991, 125). The narrator operates within prescribed social expectations, and even though he believes he creates the identity others perceive, he is still rendered invisible because he is not asserting a sense of identity which he defines and thus which he can use overtly to challenge racial stereotypes. Although he feels he has been manipulating the Brotherhood through the identity he performs, the narrator eventually comes to the horrifying realization that his performing a role has the exact same consequences as if he believed in the role he plays:

> I could see it now, see it clearly and in growing magnitude. It was not suicide, but murder. The committee had planned it. And I had helped, been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree I *had* indeed agreed, had made myself responsible for that huddled form lighted by flame and gunfire in the street, and all the others whom now the night was making ripe for death. (553)

This is the "treachery" that his grandfather spoke of: resistance through imitation may give individuals who are aware of these strategies a form of power, but their individual gain comes at the expense of the community, for the stereotypes these men mimic remain unchallenged and unproblematic for mainstream society, which benefits from their remaining intact.

To finally gain a true sense of self-definition, the narrator must remove himself from the defining but misinterpreting eye of mainstream society, and thus from the need to utilize an ambivalent, oppositionally determined discourse. When Ellison's narrator drops down a manhole, and decides to stay underground, he escapes the necessity of imitation because he no longer lives with his "'head in the lion's mouth'" (16) as his grandfather, Trueblood, and Bledsoe did. The narrator is dropping out of an interpretive field where he is exposed to the language, perceptions, and stereotypes that render him invisible. As the narrator explains, "I couldn't return to Mary's, or to the campus, or to the Brotherhood, or home. I could only move ahead or stay here, underground. So I would stay here until I was chased out. Here, at least, I could think things out in peace, or, at least, in quiet. I would take up residence underground. The end was in the beginning" (571). By remaining underground, the narrator begins the essential process of discovering and articulating through his act of narration a masculine subjectivity which depends neither upon the internalization of mainstream values and stereotypes, nor upon the ambivalent and problematic manipulation of surfaces inherent in the strategy of imitation.

No longer playing the game, the narrator finally realizes through remembering and recounting in narrative his past experiences that he has been rendered invisible by his willingness to accept the identities others have offered him. When the narrator burns the papers in his brief case (567-68) to light his way in the hole he falls into, he symbolically

discards the identities he has been given by others, identities which have rendered him invisible. Whether offered by white society or by fellow African Americans, these identities, Ellison has explained, "all say essentially the same thing, 'Keep this nigger boy running.' Before he could have some voice in his own destiny, he had to discard these old identities and illusions; his enlightenment could not come until then" (1994, 177). The narrator does not look back to recapture a comfortable past as a means of escaping the present; rather, he looks back on and uses "past humiliations" because he realizes that in these experiences he will finally discover his own identity. He begins to recognize that the events of his life "were more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me, and no blind men, no matter how powerful they became, even if they conquer the world, could take that, or change one single itch, taunt, laugh, cry, scar, ache, rage or pain of it" (508).

Discussing the importance of memory as a means to self-assertion and political action to those who are socially or economically marginalized, bell hooks writes:

> The production of terror, unmediated dread, in the minds and hearts of the exploited and oppressed binds us to a politics of domination, keeps us in place, unable to resist, afraid to resist. On all levels, confronting this dread, breaking its hold on our lives, is a joyous gesture of resistance. That remnants of the dread remain in individuals, like myself, who believe our political self-recovery to be complete, unsettles, but it need not disenable. This dread returns me to memory, to places and situations I often want to forget. It forces me to remember, to hold close the knowledge that for people globally who fight for liberation, resistance is also "a struggle of memory against forgetting." Remembering makes us subjects in history. It is dangerous to forget. (1991, 54)

Ellison's narrator must remember the pain, humiliation, and anger he has experienced in arriving at his realization that he cannot assume a sense of subjectivity, an inalienable and unchallengeable right to individual identity promised by the words "all men are created equal." As Valerie Smith argues, "the double consciousness of simultaneously playing and undermining the game proved implausible. But the solution to the problem of identity and

authority can be found in the double consciousness of reliving one's story as both narrator and protagonist" (43). Safe in his hole, and no longer willing to perform the role defined by white expectations, which results in the damaging "double-consciousness" described by DuBois, the narrator finally overcomes his invisibility and achieves masculine subjectivity through the conscious act of remembering, ordering, and interpreting his personal experiences.

Looking back over the experiences that brought him to the safety of the hole he now inhabits, the narrator explains what he has learned about himself and about his erroneous assumptions about his place in mainstream American society:

> It goes back along ways, some twenty years. All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naive. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to be born with: That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man! (15)

Ellison's narrator must learn to recognize his invisibility in a society that defines him through racial stereotypes, and also must learn to reject the models of identity offered by other African American men who try to teach him how to play a role that will help him survive in mainstream society, but which will require him to bury his desire for a sense of individual identity.

Unlike the narrators of the other narratives I have discussed, Ellison's narrator does not settle into a sense of nostalgia, for he has no comforting past to remember, but instead uses his memories of his pain and humiliation as motivation for present personal and political action. He does not disappear into his hole the same way Terence Mann disappears into the corn field, Mann's head filled with nostalgic thoughts of baseball and an idealized past he really does not share with the white characters in the film. Mann is rendered invisible because he turns his back on his former efforts to create social change

through the Civil Rights movement; he chooses to discover the magic in the cornfield, rather than assert the political implications his disappearance raises. Ellison portrays his narrator as making no such choice. Ellison has stated that his narrator "must assert and achieve his own humanity; he cannot run with the pack and do this" (1994, 179); however, once the narrator does establish his identity, he recognizes that his act of self-making must lead to social action and responsibility. He explains that "having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the patterns of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge" (580-1). The narrator now possesses a knowledge of "the game" and also possesses a strong enough sense of identity that he feels he can begin to challenge that game and the social assumptions that keep it playing. In a narrative written only a few years before Rosa Parks would, in 1955, challenge southern segregationist laws and begin what would become a national movement to assert African American identity and equality, Ellison's narrator, strengthened by a masculine subjectivity established through self-definition, exclaims that

> a decision has been made. I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it hear in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless. And I suppose it's damn well time. Even hibernations can be overdone, come to think of it. Perhaps that's my greatest social crime, overstaying my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play. (581)

Ellison suggests that while playing a role determined by white stereotypes and assumptions may be pragmatic, it does not provide his narrator with a true sense of identity, or the experience of true personal agency. Choosing to play the game only continues the game, the rules of which are defined by white society, and perpetuates the psychological damage created by "double-consciousness;" imitation does not lead to political action that challenges the game and provides the opportunity to discover and assert a self-determined African American masculine subjectivity.

Writing the Great American (Gay) Novel

Discussing the reception of Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, Michael Bronski explains that

> When Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* was published in 1978 it was an immediate popular and critical success. This was probably the first time a post-Stonewall gay novel captured the attention of mainstream reviewers. (Although such varied books as Gore Vidal's 1948 *The City and the Pillar*, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, and John Rechy's *City of Night* had attracted critical attention from the national press, they were not identified as belonging to the distinct genre of "gay fiction"). The positive reception of *Dancer from the Dance* set a standard for acceptance that much gay and lesbian literature has attempted to live up to ever since. (259)

What was the secret to the novel's success? Was it simply timing, the novel striking a chord in readers, both gay and straight? Reed Woodhouse describes the historical context of the novel's publication:

> The year was 1978, nine years into the Stonewall revolution. Homosexuality had come out of the closet with a vengeance. Not only was the fact of it acknowledged by the straight world (Gay Pride parades were now a regular event in every major city in America), but it had now changed from a personal (though of course humiliating) disability into a group identity: a "community" if you were polite, a "ghetto" if you were not. This all happened very quickly. It was as if after so many years of repression, the oppressors themselves--the church, the psychiatric establishment, the police--had simply lost interest. Perhaps it was no longer much fun to attack gay people now that there was an actual gay press to report police injustices, congressional bigotry, and gay-bashings. (101)

Gays and lesbians were becoming more visible, and were possibly gaining a small measure of acceptance among certain segments of mainstream society.

But in addition to changing attitudes toward gay culture, the popularity of Holleran's novel can be attributed to the style and structure of the novel, to the lyrical beauty of its language and imagery, which many critics recognized echoed that mainstay of the American literary canon, *The Great Gatsby*. Mark Lilly describes Holleran as "offering a kind of homage to an earlier master, reworking material in a more modern and specifically gay context" (193), and argues that the

> appeal of the two novels is their depiction of innocence in the central characters, who are surrounded by others emphatically the opposite of innocent. The myth of the United States' past is that of breaking away from the corrupt old Europe and starting a new clean enterprise on a fresh continent; the notion of innocence is thus central to American culture. Both writers locate innocence [...] primarily in the capacity for wonder and hope. (194)

Lilly explains the success of Holleran's novel by situating it within the themes and traditions of canonical American literature: readers recognized that even gay writers could explore the transhistorical theme of the tragic searching for innocence in a society which threatens the freedom of the individual.

Robert Drake provides a very different evaluation of *Dancer from the Dance* than Lilly and other critics who have celebrated the novel. In his 1998 book *The Gay Canon: Great Books Every Gay man Should Read*, Drake takes on the task of establishing for gay literature a list of books, drawn almost exclusively from the history of Western literature and culture, which comprise a history of gay male experience and its literary representations. Beginning with the Book of Samuel 1 from the Old Testament and ending with David Watmough's personal chronicle, *I Told You So* (1998), Drake gives a brief description of the texts which he feels have addressed and explored the nature of love between men. Discussing the popularity of Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, Drake argues that the novel

> has been held up as a faggot's *The Great Gatsby*, but it isn't. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel of shimmering beauty, powered by the simplicity of Jay Gatz's love for the enigmatic Daisy. There's nothing genuine about *Dancer from the Dance* except

> the characters' desire to wallow in pretensions. Although both works feature parties prominently in their pages, the similarities end there: Gatsby is a diamond at the heart of the novel you can't see quite clearly, it shines so brightly; by comparison, Holleran's Malone is a lump of coal. (406)

Drake concludes that "possibly, it [*Dancer from the Dance*] should be kept around to serve as a reminder of what happens when we praise books because of their timely politics instead of their timeless literary worth" (406); in other words, the novel is included in his canon only as an example of how popularity and celebrity are often at odds with true literary merit.

Although Drake establishes his canon by topical criteria very different than that of the mainstream canon, Drake nevertheless reproduces the traditional belief that true literature transcends time and place, a belief challenged for several decades by scholars of traditionally marginalized literatures. Drake concludes his book by explaining that "*The Gay Canon* is about [...] the love of men for each other, the value of history, the potential for the future" (468), yet he also makes clear in his discussions of the literary works he cites that while his subject matter is distinct from that of the mainstream literary canon, his ideas about literary value and merit are strongly influenced by that mainstream tradition. Drake sees Holleran's novel as derivative and as reproducing mainstream stereotypes about gay culture, yet he nevertheless shares with Lilly the need to read the novel through the thematic and aesthetic criteria which define and determine mainstream literary canonicity.

Challenging both these readings, I will argue that *Dancer from the Dance* is both a popular narrative about gay culture and a novel which explores the nature of its own popularity, as well as the popularity of the novel it echoes, *The Great Gatsby*. Holleran's meta-narrative, largely unexplored by critics, presents a dialogue between the author of the main narrative and his friend through which they discuss the issue of how to write a popular, yet literary, gay novel. Thus, Holleran portrays his narrator as writing a popular gay novel--popular because it provides a story of mourning, nostalgia, and tragedy, stereotypes of gay culture that a mainstream reading public wants, and does not present explicit sexuality or characters who demand gay rights: the political activism of the post-

Stonewall period is conspicuous by its absence in the main narrative. But Holleran's meta-narrative problematizes that very popularity by exposing its limitations in portraying the complexity and diversity of gay culture and experience.

Drake and Lily correctly recognize the echoes of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in the main narrative of *Dancer from the Dance*, for Holleran's novel is told by a first-person narrator who looks back with feelings of loss and nostalgia for a man whom he never really knew, but who came to be "the central symbol" (56) of the world in which each lived. Like Nick Carraway, Holleran's narrator begins by reflecting on advice given to him by his father, and like Nick, he is left to sort through Malone's possessions and try to make sense of his now presumed-dead hero. They were not close friends: Malone "was just a face I saw in a discotheque one winter," and "was hardly even a friend--something much more, and much less perhaps" (23), yet the narrator returns to the large, empty house on Fire Island where Malone stayed, to sort through clothes, including the "thirty-seven T-shirts in different colors" and "thirty-two plaid shirts" which remain as "emblems of Malone's innocent heart, his inexhaustible desire to be liked" (28-9). Surrounded by Malone's possessions, which remain in a place where only weeks before Malone had been surrounded by admirers, but which is now empty, the narrator feels consumed by "a sudden wish to feast on the past" (30), a need to remember Malone and retell his story in hopes that he will somehow be able to capture the essence of Malone's character and what he meant to the narrator.

To Holleran's narrator, Malone is a tragic character because he is trapped between worlds, between a nostalgic desire for a straight life of upper middle-class stability and a life where he can admire, and be admired for, male physical beauty. Malone's sexuality creates a sense of alienation early in his life; as an adolescent, "while his life was impeccable on the surface, he felt he was behind glass" because when his friends discussed their heterosexual desires, he experienced a "dissociation between his feelings and the feelings of all his friends" (64, 65). Discovering his sexuality, Malone reacts by concluding that "It was of course completely wrong, the completely inconvenient sort of love; it was the one thing he--who had succeeded in everything else, who had been so virtuous, such a model--could not allow. It was as if he had finally admitted to himself

that he had cancer" (71-2). Gatsby believes he can remake himself into a man worthy of Daisy; similarly, Malone believes that he can will himself to fit, if not a heterosexual, then at least a non-sexual, model of upper middle-class perfection--the right house, education, job--so he is frustrated by a sexuality he does not want and cannot control. He sees his sexuality as a tragic flaw, "God's joke. His little joke. To keep us human. To humble the proud. And I have been so proud" (75), and even after Malone becomes part of the New York gay community and makes regular trips to Fire Island, he still longs for the life the narrator suggests all gay men really desire:

> It was the sort of scene Malone turned sentimental over. He always passed through Sayville with a lingering regret for its big white houses and friendly front yards with picket fences and climbing roses. He always looked back as he went through, saying this might be the perfect town he was always searching for, where elms and lawns would be combined with people he loved. But those summer taxis drove inevitably through it, like vans bearing prisoners who are being transferred from one prison to another--from Manhattan to Fire Island--when all we dreamed of, in our deepest dreams, was just such a town as this, quiet, green, untroubled by the snobberies and ambition of the larger world, the world we could not quit. (24)

Malone is a "prisoner" of love (one of the many cliches which I will argue Holleran consciously has his narrator use to describe Malone) who, because of his own sexuality and the homophobia of mainstream society, can only pass through the world he has rendered ideal through his sentimental nostalgia.

In the same way that critics, starting with Lionel Trilling, believe Gatsby symbolizes America, Holleran's narrator believes Malone is a tragic and romantic figure who symbolizes the essence of New York gay culture. His beauty, innocence, and desire to find true and lasting love make him vulnerable, and finally tragic: "Malone wanted life to be beautiful and Malone believed quite literally in happiness--in short, he was the most romantic creature in a community whose citizens are more romantic, perhaps, than any other on earth, and in the end--he learned--more philistine" (34). Gatsby has dreams of

wealth, but does not understand or accept the rules of the wealthy, and Malone dreams of eternal love and beauty in a culture defined by sex. The narrator says of Malone, "He wanted to keep his life in the realm of the perfect, the ideal. He wanted to be desired, not possessed, for in remaining desired he remained, like the figure on the Grecian urn, forever pursued" (43). Nick Carraway's tribute to Gatsby is also a criticism of men like Tom Buchanan and Meyer Wolfshiem, men who warp the innocent dreams which motivated Gatsby to remake himself. The story of Malone's tragic life and death also criticizes the shallowness of the late-seventies New York gay community, a community which Holleran argues places no limits on love and sex. Reed Woodhouse argues that Malone's tragedy results from "excessive freedom:"

> the ghetto Malone entered was a kind of *a fortiori* argument about freedom. It could form a perfect fictional crucible: what if we took a character, Malone, with virtually nothing to stop him, and put him in a time and place where he could seemingly sail all the way home? What would a human being do in a state of near-zero "drag" on his freedom and will? (122)[2]

Gatsby believes he can "repeat the past," and aspires to recapture a moment with Daisy long since vanished; Malone remains in the gay community because he "still had a wistful memory of that romantic dream, of a kind and wistful Latin youth, lying in his arms in some room somewhere, a dream in which the things the world cared about were irrelevant" (187).

Holleran's narrator seems to share Malone's romantic aspirations, though not to the same degree, yet unlike Malone, the narrator will not act upon them. He is not the hero of the novel, the object of so many people's affection and attention, but is an observer; he goes to the nightclubs but instead of dancing, he chooses "to sit on the sofa in the back of the Twelfth Floor and wonder" (40). Discussing Malone with a friend, after Malone's death, the narrator admits, "I thought Malone was the handsomest man I'd ever seen. But then I was in love with half those people, and I never said hello or good-bye to any of them" (36). Though he does not act on his feelings, the narrator seems to suffer under what he describes as "the most beautiful illusion of homosexuals and romantics

alike: if only I'd loved that one ..." (220). While Malone was admired and discussed by many, the narrator seems to give him a symbolic importance which reveals a love for Malone that the narrator never admits to him, but that now motivates the narrator to tell Malone's story:

> if Malone was, in the end, only a face I saw in a discotheque one winter, he was somehow the figure on which everything rested. The central beautiful symbol. As long as he was enmeshed, as long as that room could draw him back (as it had now), so was I [...]. Why did I never try to know these people whom I adored? I do not know. But though I'd never spoken to Malone, I loved him, and though I'd never tried to meet him, he was the only person in that huge city whose life, whose fate, I found absorbing. (133)

Nick feels obligated to explain the motives behind Gatsby's behaviour in order to dispel the misinformation that surrounded his life and death, and Holleran's narrator fears that "Malone would be memorialized in gossip," and thus it is his responsibility to explain the facts and symbolic meaning of Malone's character, life, and death. He wonders, "If not this gypsy throng, who would mourn Malone? He lived perhaps in my memory: I would always think of this place, this sea, this sky, his face together, and wonder if he had wasted his life" (33).

The narrator's story is thus a nostalgic tribute to Malone, a narrative filled with feelings of sadness for innocence lost, and motivated by a desire to explain Malone and through him, capture the sadness and emptiness of life in New York's gay community in the seventies. Given its not so subtle references to *The Great Gatsby*, should we celebrate Holleran's novel as a tribute to Fitzgerald? Or should we dismiss *Dancer from the Dance* as simply being derivative of Fitzgerald's "masterpiece," as Robert Drake suggests? Or is its popularity derived from something even more problematic than being simply derivative? James Levin argues that

> Holleran has clothed Malone's story in a rambling narrative with incomprehensible chronology and a stream-of-consciousness style. To many this seemed to elevate it far above the usual prosaic realism of most

> novels about homosexuality. In their desire to laud the style they overlook the content, but Holleran's contempt is obvious. (285)

Joseph Cady argues "in content Holleran's work chiefly falls into what I call the concessive and ironic modes of gay male literature. Its concessiveness is clearly in its frequently despairing statements about same-sex love, i.e., statements that seem to concede to the dominant culture by repeating its most negative conceptions and terms for homosexuality" (259). He continues:

> When not being baldly concessive, Holleran's presentation of homosexuality is often restrictively ironic. Gay male literature's ironic mode is defined by a seemingly unintended contradiction. Rather than despairingly echo homosexual stereotype, ironic gay male writing seems to celebrate it. Yet this apparent rebelliousness still has an inescapable complicity with the dominant culture. (259)

So under the nostalgia and sadness, is *Dancer from the Dance* a shallow and even harmful novel that simply reproduces the traditional stereotype of the sex-obsessed, self-loathing, self-destructive homosexual? Is it an example of the ambivalence of imitation as a strategy of critique, a strategy which Ellison's narrator finally rejects as ineffective because of the psychological damage it inflicts?

To understand how Holleran uses both allusions to *The Great Gatsby* and stereotypes about the gay community, we have to recognize that the main narrative represents the work of an aspiring novelist who is a character that Holleran creates; in other words, we must distinguish this fictional author/narrator from Holleran, who portrays his narrator as a young writer struggling to create a novel which will be popular yet important, accepted by mainstream readers yet set in New York's gay community. If the main narrative is a novel written by the narrator, Holleran explores issues of literary popularity and its reliance on stereotypes and audience expectations through the meta-narrative which frames that main narrative. In his novel the narrator mentions, in passing, how while he is wandering around the now empty house on Fire Island, thinking about Malone, he hears someone yell "the opening line of *Peyton Place*, the favorite mockery of an aspiring novelist" (35). Interpreting this as "mockery," the narrator reveals his literary

aspirations. He does not want to write another *Peyton Place*, an extremely popular novel known only for its tawdry subject matter.[3] The narrator desires to create a novel of literary merit which captures a sense of Malone's tragedy; as he tells his friend to whom he has sent his novel in the meta-narrative, he wants to explore "why life is SAD. And what people do for love (everything)--whether they're gay or straight" (18). The author wants to be a serious writer discussing important issues, and does not want to be typed as a "gay writer," and that is why he insists that "my novel is not about fags. It is about a few characters who happen to be gay (I know that's a cliche, but it's true)" (17-8). It is not surprising that, as an aspiring novelist, Holleran's narrator would choose as a model a novel considered by most a "masterpiece" that captures the romantic, and tragic, illusions that destroy Gatsby, yet also inspire him to win Daisy. Gatsby's story has not only been praised for its beauty, but has been read as capturing the essence of the American myth and culture, so it seems a sensible choice as a model for the narrator's first novel.

Recognizing that literary popularity means communicating transhistorical themes through a complex and symbolic hero, the narrator fills his novel with stereotypes and accepted popular myths--in this case about the gay community--because that is what readers want to read, an idea explored by Holleran in the dialogue between his narrator and the friend in the meta-narrative. The friend suggests,

> you would have to make your novel very sad--the world demands that gay life, like the life of the Very Rich, be ultimately sad, for everyone in this country believes, down deep in their heart, that to be happy you must have a two-story house in the suburbs and a FAMILY--a wife and 2.6 kids and a station wagon and a big dog and an elm tree with a tire hanging from it on a rope. Please, darling, there is not much variation of opinion in this country, or any country, for that matter; the whole world wants to be like *My Three Sons*. So (a) people would puke over a novel about men who suck dick (not to mention the Other Things!), and (b) they would demand it be ultimately violent and/or tragic, so why give in to them? (15)

Holleran implies that his narrator's tone and use of stereotypes are part of a rhetorical strategy to ensure a wider audience whose expectations are limited by these stereotypes, but whose assumptions determine literary popularity. The friend recognizes that

mainstream literary success not only involves reinforcing stereotypes, but censoring potentially offensive material: "Even if people accept fags out of kindness, even if they tolerate the poor dears, they don't want to know WHAT THEY DO. Canons of taste must be observed" (14-15).

But the narrator's subject matter and portrayal of Malone are not only his response to the reading public's expectations; he admits that he projects onto the character of Malone his own disillusionment with gay life. As the narrator admits to his friend, "I would LIKE to be a happily married attorney with a house in the suburbs, 2.6 kids, and a station wagon, in which we would drive every summer to see the Grand Canyon, but I'm not! I am completely, hopelessly gay!" (17). Holleran particularizes his narrator, revealing that his narrative cannot be read as a transcultural, transhistorical truth about gay life as captured symbolically in the life, illusions, and tragic end of Malone; rather, the novel represents one gay writer's perception of what it means to be gay. Through the meta-narrative, Holleran reveals that his narrator's belief that gay men are doomed to lives of sadness and tragedy to be one perception of gay life, a perception that determines the tone of his novel and the symbolic meaning of Malone.

The narrator would like us to believe that Malone is "the central symbol on which all of it rested" (56), but through the meta-narrative, Holleran problematizes the narrator's wish to present his novel as capturing the "truth" about gay life. The narrator attempts to find a singular symbolic essence, Malone, which captures the sadness of gay men, but his friend challenges this singular representation by reminding the narrator that "life so seldom imitates art" (242). Undermining the narrator's nostalgic idealization of Malone, the friend explains to the narrator

> You can't love eyes, my dear, you can't love youth, you can't love summer dusks that washed us out of our tenements into the streets like water falling over rocks--no, dear, madness that way lies. You must stick to earth, always, you must love another man or woman, a human lover whose farts occasionally punctuate the silence of your bedroom in the morning and who now and then has bad moods that must be catered to. (244)

The friend reveals Malone's seemingly tragic innocence as a refusal to accept reality, a

refusal that motivates the narrator to idealize Malone as possessing an insight that made him both great and tragic, rather than merely unrealistic and unaccepting of his own and others' limitations.

I have argued throughout this dissertation that the narratives I have discussed have been traditionally interpreted as portraying characters who epitomize traditional American themes, rather than the socially and historically particular experiences of men who perceive their masculinity as threatened. Through his meta-narrative, Holleran suggests that not only "madness" lies in the direction of his narrator nostalgically idealizing Malone and perceiving him as the symbol of gay experience, but he also warns that this sort of generalization can lead to an unconscious acceptance of the stereotypes his narrative reproduces. The friend tells the narrator, "Let us not, after all, dignify Malone too much. He was in the end a circuit queen" and explains that "we are not doomed because we are homosexual, my dear, we are doomed only if we live in despair because of it, as we did on the beaches and streets of Suck City" (249). Discussing these two disagreeing voices of the meta-narrative, Woodhouse argues that the novel's "intentions are multiple and even contradictory. Indeed, the two letter-writers whose scabrous ruminations frame the novel raise this question themselves. Is Malone's story tragic or just ridiculous? Is he a good man caught in a bad world, or a silly deluded 'circuit queen'?" (121).[4] As Holleran makes clear through his meta-narrative, Malone is both, depending on who interprets his character and actions, for like any symbol he hides his historical and ideological particularity behind the illusion of transhistorical signification.

Holleran suggests that his narrator's portrayal of gay men as sad and tragic reveals both the narrator's own feelings of discontent at being gay and his awareness of the need to use stereotypes, and suppress sex and politics, if his novel is to be accepted by mainstream critics and readers. Holleran reveals the particularity of his narrator's perception of gay life by revealing in the meta-narrative that the narrator portrays only one small part of a much larger, varied gay population. Even within the clubs, where the narrator focuses on Malone, dancing, and nostalgia, there existed a political presence in the seventies which remains absent from the narrator's novel. In his book *Stonewall*, Martin Duberman describes how

> A little more than a year after its inception, the G[ay] A[ctivists] A[lliance] decided to lease an abandoned firehouse in the SoHo district of Manhattan. The Firehouse quickly became the political and cultural headquarters for the gay movement in New York, its spacious headquarters the beehive of assorted activities. On Saturday nights, the large meeting hall would be converted into a dance floor and the packed revels (an average crowd of fifteen hundred per dance) become a cherished alternative to the bar scene, drawing the apolitical as well as the committed. (233)

Molly McGarry and Fred Wasserman describe how "By the end of 1970, the roughly fifty homophile groups that existed at the time of Stonewall had mushroomed to two hundred, and by the end of 1973, more than one thousand lesbian and gay organizations had been founded nationwide--gay churches and synagogues, political caucuses and youth groups, counseling centers and consciousness-raising groups" (160). Political activism was clearly widespread during the time the narrator describes, yet it remains absent from his novel, though not from Holleran's. Revealing the politics the narrator has chosen to exclude from his novel, the friend asks the narrator

> do you realize what a tiny fraction of the mass of homosexuals we were? That day we marched to Central Park and found ourselves in a sea of humanity, how stunned I was to recognize no more than four or five faces? (Of course our friends were all at the beach, darling; they couldn't be bothered to come in and make a political statement.) I used to say there were only seventeen homosexuals in New York, and we knew every one of them; but there were tons of men there who weren't on the circuit, who didn't dance, didn't cruise, didn't fall in love with Malone, who stayed home and went to the country in the summer. We never saw them. We were addicted to something else: something I lived with so long it had become a technique, a routine. That was the real sin. I was too smart, I built a wall around myself. (249-50)

At a rally for gay rights, the friend gains an insight that motivates him to finally leave the New York gay circuit that the narrator continues to both romanticize and resent. But as

Holleran implies through the friend, gay men live a far greater range of lives than the narrator captures in his nostalgic tribute to Malone. Focused on representing what he believes is the essence of gay experience, and on echoing the style and themes of *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator recognizes that nostalgia, symbolism, and the tragedy of gay life will sell books and help him gain mainstream popularity. But as Holleran communicates through the meta-narrative which problematizes the narrator's novel, the narrator fails to recognize that imitating mainstream stereotypes about gay life undermines the possibility of representing the diversity of seventies gay culture, as well as the possibility for self-acceptance and political action in the present and future.

Notes

1. See Lyne for a discussion of the critical tradition of situating Ellison within the context of Modernism, and for an insightful discussion of how Ellison problematizes Modernism through his exploration of race.

2. Larry Kramer's *Faggots* (1978), which was published the same year as *Dancer from the Dance*, but "to caustic reviews in the gay press" (Boney 295), is a much more critical portrayal of the "circuit queens" of Manhattan and their focus on sex. Kramer condemns what he feels is the irresponsible use of the growing freedom experienced by gays--Bradley Boney explains that "Larry Kramer has waged a war within and against a community built on sexual freedom" (293)--for he feels that the focus on sex reinscribes the stereotypes of gays as "perverts" and "sexual predators." For an insightful comparison of *Faggots* and *Dancer from the Dance*, see Woodhouse.

3. For a discussion of the reception and reputation of *Peyton Place*, see my "Chapter Three."

4. In an interesting reading of the frame narrative, Reed Woodhouse suggests that the two speakers represent the two conflicting aspects of Malone's character (127-30).

CONCLUSION

Through this dissertation, I have sought to provide a flexible theoretical approach to reading canonicity and how it relates to the traditional universalizing of male experiences in American literature. My interest has been to challenge totalizing theories and definitions of American literature which fail to recognize or address the complex interconnection between history, ideology, canonicity, and the multiple axes through which we understand identity. The genealogy I provided in my Introduction revealed the importance of contextualizing a work of literature as a means of challenging the ahistorical, unifying theories of American literature which traditionally identified transhistorical "American themes" in some texts, and simply ignored those texts which did not seem to fit into the tradition. As the early dismissal of *The Great Gatsby* by literary critics reveals, canonicity does not reside inherently within the text, but instead involves fitting texts into historically and ideologically specific "meta-narratives" which have come to shape and define traditional American cultural and literary studies.

Recent challenges to canonicity have been valuable in drawing attention to the exclusion of many texts by mainstream critics, but arguing that the canon is a list of books, and that the books themselves are thus either inside or outside the canon, fails to recognize that canonicity involves not particular texts but the themes and theories through which those texts are interpreted: previously excluded texts can be interpreted so as to fit into the canon, and seemingly canonical texts can be read to reveal social and political issues not addressed within the parameters of traditional theories of American literature. Contextualizing a work of literature can reveal the multiple and contradictory social issues and attitudes which consciously and unconsciously inform the writer and his or her text. With an awareness of the historical moment a text represents, we can recognize how a novel like *On the Road* can challenge mainstream values--about materialism, conformity, and domesticated masculinity--and introduce middle-class kids to jazz while making visible African American culture, yet at the same time can reproduce mainstream stereotypes about race, class, and gender. To argue that this novel reproduces a singular canonical ideology involves the same ahistorical simplification of the novel as arguing that it is

simply a quest story, like *Moby Dick* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: the novel presents a cultural moment, the complexity of which can best be understood by recognizing the historical context in which the text was written and published.

Related to my problematizing of the concept of canonicity is my desire to create a more complex and flexible method of understanding the experience and representation of masculinities. Feminist theory has provided the means to explore the social construction of gender, yet as I have suggested, the concept of "patriarchy" remains problematic as a totalizing concept which fails to address the particularity of oppression between men and women, as well as between men. To argue that Ken Kesey portrays patriarchal oppression through his misogynistic representation of women does no more to capture the complexity of gender relations within *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* than does Harding's claim that the men are "victims of a matriarchy." Without losing sight of the fact that men as a group do oppress women as a group, I try to explore the representation of male experience using a masculinities model, a model that recognizes that issues of sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, and class inform the multiple and sometimes contradictory experiences and identities of men. Influenced by R. W. Connell's work on masculinities, I argue that to effectively understand the complexities of gender oppression, we need to realize that masculinities are not fixed identities determined by these differences, but are flexible, relative, and reflect particular social practices. In *Dancer from the Dance*, for example, Holleran's meta-narrative reveals two very different interpretations and experiences of being gay, a fact which undermines the attempt to define a single gay identity. Similarly, "hegemonic masculinity," like patriarchy, suggests a fixed position within masculinity: one is either inside or outside, oppressor or oppressed. But the particular masculine practices in which one engages in relation to others show the fluidity of one's masculine position. As Judith Butler would argue, the social practices do not *reflect* an inherent and fixed masculine identity; rather, the contextualized social practices *define* the masculine identity, an identity always determined *in relation* to the equally complex and fluid identities of women and other men.

It is this complex, fluid understanding of masculinities that I have tried to apply to my reading of the representations of male experience in the texts I have discussed.

Combining a recognition of historical context with a description of the social practices which I argue define traditional masculinity--nostalgia for a traditional ideal of masculinity as a response to a perceived crisis in masculinity--I have attempted to explore these texts, not as reflecting American themes of the individual versus society, freedom versus conformity, nor as simple misogynistic, homophobic, and/or racist representations of patriarchal power in response to imagined victimization, but as articulating the anxieties of particular men who are responding to particular historical and social changes which they believe threaten their masculinity. Critics have fit these texts within the tradition of American literature by providing ahistorical readings of their historically and gender specific conflicts, an act of interpretation which reflects a central practice of traditional masculinity: the nostalgic reliance on a transhistorical, transcultural ideal of masculinity which accompanies a necessary reluctance to recognize the historical and ideological particularity of the crises they identify. Robert Bly's *Iron John*, which I discussed in Chapter Five, represents the most explicit example of this desire to escape history and look to a mythic past to find an inherent, essential masculinity which has been taken from men. Though I am critical of the conservative and exclusionary politics which underlie this nostalgic reliance on an originary masculinity, my task as a scholar of masculinities involves not simply dismissing these perceived crises as imaginary and dangerous; rather, my interest lies in historicizing these narratives to explore what underlies these perceptions of crisis, and how these perceived crises are represented through the characters, setting, and plot which comprise the narrative. At the same time, I try to reveal the complex and problematic assumptions about masculinity, exclusion, oppression, and social privilege that also define traditional masculinity.

I have identified several practices which define traditional masculinity in the four narratives I discuss, but I have tried to avoid forcing the texts to fit a singular definition of traditional masculinity. Exploring the socio-historical context of the various narratives has helped me establish differences between the particular social practices I have identified. All the novels share feelings of nostalgia, and respond to a perceived crisis in masculinity by idealizing a hero whom the narrator portrays as symbolizing a lost or threatened ideal of masculinity. Yet, writing in different historical moments, each author portrays a very

different representation of this crisis, as well as a different portrayal of their masculine ideal, as represented through the character and actions of the hero.

Nick, with his own mix of idealism and middle-class masculine values, admires Gatsby for his politeness, his dreams, his practical self-making, and his naive idealism, so Gatsby clearly represents a very different kind of masculine ideal than McMurphy. In fact, the masculinity that Chief Bromden celebrates in McMurphy shares several common traits with the aggressive, virile masculinity that Nick vilifies in Tom Buchanan. But then Chief Bromden does not share the comfort and security of Nick's middle-class family life. And while I have suggested that McMurphy and Dean share similar traits--their energy, their role as con men, and their desire for sexual freedom--Dean's selfishness, which echoes Tom Buchanan's self-centeredness, motivates Sal to abandon Dean and the road for dreams of wedded bliss and middle-class stability; in contrast to Dean, McMurphy chooses to sacrifice himself for the benefit of Chief Bromden and the other men. Like Gatsby, Shoeless Joe, Terence Mann, and Ray's father are men who had dreams which have been lost, but unlike Gatsby, these men are redeemed by more than just a sympathetic narrator's words. The magic of baseball, and Hollywood, lets these men live again as boys with a clear, untroubled sense of masculine identity, and lets Ray balance the role of dreamer and entrepreneur, a mixture that finally destroyed Gatsby. Unlike the other narrators, Ray writes from two different historical and personal subject positions: the young sixties "radical" whose values alienated him from his father and the eighties middle-aged husband and father who rejects his past values and reconnects with his father as part of accepting his adult responsibilities. Each of these narratives uses nostalgia for a threatened ideal of masculine identity, but the particular characteristics of that masculinity, the crisis which threatens it, and the portrayal of, and relationship between, the narrator and the hero, reflect very different historical moments informed by specific social and ideological concerns.

I explained in my Introduction how Jane Tompkins' book *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* has influenced my reading of texts as revealing the social issues and concerns of the historical moment they were written and published. To understand a text is to understand the "cultural work" that text does in its

own context, and thus Tompkins' emphasizes her reluctance to judge the attitudes and ideologies of the authors whose texts she discusses. But during the writing of this dissertation, I have sometimes wondered whether this reluctance to judge what appears to me as a racist or homophobic or misogynistic ideology sets up a moral relativism that fails to challenge such oppressive ideologies and social practices. Although we can forgive, or at least not judge, the past because it is the past, the oppression revealed in these texts, though maintained in different forms, continues to exist in the present moment. Do we sit back and objectively discuss the representation of oppression without expressing anger over what we may feel are past injustices which may continue in the present? Does not judging the past mean that we should also not judge the present?

As critics we must avoid establishing simple models of oppression which allow for simple judgments--canonicity, patriarchy, society, Momism--yet we must also identify the issues of oppression as a means of both understanding the nature, and challenging the perpetuation, of that oppression. Frederic Jameson has argued that narratives provide "imaginary or 'formal' solutions to unresolvable social contradictions" (79), and thus the literary scholar's task involves revealing the "social contradictions" hidden by the conflicts and problematic resolutions authors provide through their narratives. But as my discussion of canonicity suggests, we must also be aware that the solutions suggested by a narrative do not reside strictly within the text: a flexible, historically and ideologically informed approach to reading texts can help us avoid seeing simple resolutions because we assume and fix the ideological position of an otherwise complex and contradictory text. To understand the cultural work a text performs in its own context, Tompkins would argue, we need to understand that context, and thus the "unresolvable social contradictions" which the text reveals through its attempts to resolve them.

Of course, the focus on historicizing texts while reserving judgment of those texts raises other questions: Can we really abandon our own historical and ideological context to inhabit, or at least gain some understanding of, another historical moment? Can we impartially discuss the complex and contradictory ideological positions of writers from other times and places? I discussed the transformation of American literary studies in my Introduction, but one of the changes in critical perception I did not mention involves the

recognition that the critic can never be completely impartial, for all critics, like all novelists, write in a context informed by a variety of social and ideological influences. As Louis Montrose explains,

> our professional practice is, like our subject matter, a production of ideology. By this I mean that it bears traces of the professor's values, beliefs, and experiences--his or her socially constructed subjectivity--and also that it actively--if not always consciously, and rarely consistently--instantiates those values, beliefs, and experiences. Like anyone else's, my readings of cultural texts cannot but be partial--by which I mean incapable of offering an exhaustive description, a complete explanation; but also incapable of offering any description that is disinterested, that is located at some Archimedian point outside the history I study, in some ideal space that transcends the coordinates of gender, ethnicity, class, age, and profession that plot my own shifting and contradictory subject positions. (396-7)

As critics, we never innocently or impartially interpret texts because our readings are always informed by conscious and unconscious ideological positions. To understand the role of a text in its own context, we must begin by recognizing the "socially constructed subjectivity" that informs our interpretation of literary and cultural texts.

In my "Preface" I provided a brief description of the academic and scholarly experiences which have influenced my perception of American literary studies. But in addition to a "theoretical" interest in the study of masculinities, my desire to create a more flexible and subtle analysis of masculinities, as well as my desire to problematize traditional masculinity, arises from my own experiences as a man. Though I would seem, by appearance, to fit into the category of "hegemonic" masculinity--I am tall, athletic, well-educated, white, and heterosexual--I have never felt part of the mainstream masculine ideal society has taught me I should aspire to. I was never one to assert my dominance over other men by fighting, but like Harding I relied on intelligence to establish my position among my peers at school, a position not usually respected by boys who measure themselves by their toughness and athletic prowess. Nevertheless, when I was thirteen I

tried out for the football team and played a few games, though I never really had any interest in, or gained any sense of satisfaction from, contact sports: my male relatives all watched football, so it seemed like the thing to do. I also realized, even as an adolescent, that I preferred the more intimate conversational style of women to the impersonal banter of men: I always felt a sense of separation from men, who seemed to need to remain distant by mediating their interactions with other men. As a result, I have had more close female friends than male, my few close male friends being men who seem able to discuss personal and intimate concerns without fear or homophobia. I also have realized that, in contrast to the popular stereotype, I have often been the communicator in my more intimate relationships with women. Like other women with whom I have been involved, my wife tends not to talk things out, but lets them build up, while I am intent on verbally airing grievances: I have always believed discussion is a healthy sign in a relationship, whereas the stereotype portrays men as feeling that the need for verbal communication only reflects problems between men and women.

Though I am no longer the kid picked last for the team--I gained a sudden athletic ability in the eleventh grade, and tried to spend the rest of my time at high school living up to the role of a "jock"--and no doubt benefit, even if unintentionally, from a patriarchal system that privileges heterosexual white males, I still feel that I do not fit the masculine ideal to which I am supposed to aspire. Of course, I do not wish to suggest that my dissociation from this model of masculinity is complete. I enjoy sports, am competitive in the sports I play (too much so, my wife would say), and do turn to look when I see an attractive woman, though I sometimes feel a simultaneous sense of guilt about objectifying her. In other words, my relationship with our society's ideal of masculinity is sometimes alienating, sometimes complicitous, and thus always contradictory. The recognition that no man can really live up to this ideal, and that attempting to causes much of the violence, loneliness, and frustration in men, has influenced my desire to explore the disparity between the experience of masculinity and the ideal, whether perceived from the "inside" as a lost "traditional masculinity" to be recaptured, or from the "outside" as an oppressive patriarchy to be dismantled. As a man who feels somewhat alienated and oppressed by an ideal which I recognize also affords me social privilege, I believe my identity is comprised

of many complex and contradictory subject positions which together inform my reading of the texts I have discussed. Feminists in the seventies taught us that "the personal is the political," and like feminist, African American, gay, or lesbian scholars who wish to articulate their experiences and perceptions, I too feel a desire to articulate the complexity of masculine experience, the "shifting and contradictory subject positions" suggested by the term "masculinities."

I remember how, during the oral examination of my Candidacy Exams, a female professor asked me if I didn't feel that focusing my dissertation on male writers and masculinity was simply another way of reinscribing male privilege. Four years later, having written this dissertation, I feel I have an answer: If we recognize that men represent one gender but a variety of subject positions, we can begin to challenge the traditional perception of men as inhabiting a singular, universal subject position, a perception which has allowed certain men to subsume the identities of all women and most men, but has also precluded the ability to understand the contradictory relationship almost all men have with their society's masculine ideal. As long as we do not forget that in the present system of masculine social practices, men as a group do oppress women as a group, I feel that exploring the complexities and contradictions of men's experiences of masculinity can only help us better understand the complexities of gender identity and gender relations between men and women, as well as between men.

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